

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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**New Report: Reduced driving rates likely to hold, with major implications for the nation's infrastructure**

*Millennials lead the change in transportation trends*

As the average number of miles driven by Americans heads into its eighth year of decline, a new report from U.S. PIRG Education Fund (released locally by the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign and Tri-State Transportation Campaign) finds that the slowdown in driving is likely to continue. Baby boomers — the largest generation at peak driving age — are moving out of that phase in their life, while driving-averse millennials come into that period of life. These demographic and other changes will likely depress driving levels for decades, according to the report, [“A New Direction: Our Changing Relationship with Driving and the Implications for America's Future.”](#)

“Transit ridership has reached record highs, but it's no time to rest on our laurels,” said Straphangers Campaign senior attorney Gene Russianoff. “The demographics demand we expand and improve the public transportation system that keeps New York running.”

“We can't build projects for tomorrow based on assumptions from yesterday,” said Veronica Vanterpool, executive director of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. “Transit-oriented development and innovative projects like New York City's bike-sharing system are the wave of the future.”

“The driving boom is over,” said Phineas Baxandall, Senior Analyst at the U.S. PIRG Education Fund and co-author of the report. “The constant increases we saw in driving before 2005 are unlikely to return. And if millennials' tendency to drive less becomes the norm as they age, the reduction in driving will be even larger.”

Miles driven per capita peaked in 2004 and the total number of miles driven by Americans peaked in 2007. The average American currently drives no more miles than at the end of President Clinton's first term.

The millennial generation is leading the change in transportation trends. Those 16 to 34 drove 23 percent fewer miles on average in 2009 than in 2001 —a greater decline in driving than any other age group. In addition, millennials are more likely to want to live in urban and walkable neighborhoods and are more open to non-driving forms of transportation than older Americans.

“Though millennials may drive more as they grow older and move into peak-driving and commuting age, they'll likely drive far fewer miles per person than their boomer parents did,” said Vanterpool. “To succeed in the 21st century, cities and towns will need housing and commercial options in transit-accessible, walkable neighborhoods.”

The report finds that under any reasonable scenario, the number of miles driven annually will be far fewer in the future than if Baby Boom trends had continued. The driving boom during the second half of the 20th century was fueled by low gas prices, rapid suburbanization, and an ever-increasing number of women commuters entering the workforce. Under some conservative scenarios, driving won't ever regain its 2007 peak during the range of the study, which extends to 2040.

Unfortunately, official forecasts of future vehicle travel from government agencies, such as the Energy Information Administration, fail to reflect these changes and continue to assume steady increases in driving.

“Many planned road projects are based on traffic studies that are ten or even twenty years old. We need our leaders to rethink whether the projects currently in the pipeline were planned using an obsolete understanding of future driving trends,” said Vanterpool.

The report examines a number of high-profile official transportation forecasts and finds a consistent pattern of overestimating how much Americans will drive, and then only partially revising those forecasts when they turn out to be incorrect. The government forecasts examined all seem to be based on the assumption that the driving boom will last forever, and all fall above even the most conservative scenarios forecast in the report.

Changes in driving habits will affect the amount of revenue the government collects for transportation. Coupled with improvements in fuel efficiency, reduced driving means Americans will use about half as much gasoline and other fuels in 2040 than they use today, making the real value of gas taxes fall as much as 74 percent. Gas taxes provide the chief source of federal transportation funds and are a major funding source for many states.

“These trends make it clear that, as a nation, we need to take a hard look at our transportation programs, whether we are building what we need for the rest of this century, what we ought to build instead and how to pay for it,” said James Corless, director of Transportation for America.

Download “A New Direction: Our Changing Relationship with Driving and the Implications for America's Future” at <http://www.uspirg.org/new-direction-report>.

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The New York Public Interest Research Group is New York State's grass roots environmental organization and is directed by college students. Its mass transit project, the Straphangers Campaign, organizes and advocates for New York City subway and bus riders to win safe, affordable and reliable transit. [www.nypirg.org](http://www.nypirg.org) [www.straphangers.org](http://www.straphangers.org).

Tri-State Transportation Campaign is a non-profit organization working toward a more balanced, transit-friendly and equitable transportation system in Connecticut, New York and New Jersey. [www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)

U.S. PIRG Education Fund works to protect consumers and promote good government. We investigate problems, craft solutions, educate the public, and offer meaningful opportunities for civic participation. [www.uspirgedfund.org](http://www.uspirgedfund.org)