



April 30, 2025

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chairman
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Graves, and Ranking Member Larsen:

The below signed organizations – representing hundreds of thousands of mostly small businesses, as well as American cities and localities and blind entrepreneurs – urge you to continue protect the longstanding ban on commercializing Interstate rest areas as you consider legislation to reauthorize surface transportation programs and incentivize investments in America’s infrastructure.

We urge you to reject any proposals to carve out exceptions to the commercialization ban that would allow state governments to compete against the private sector by offering food and automotive services, including electric vehicle charging, or other commercial services at Interstate rest areas. The private sector’s ability to operate in a competitive and robust marketplace ensures its ability to provide jobs, generate critical tax revenues, and further enhance investments in alternative fuels.

When Congress created the Interstate Highway System in 1956, Congress and community leaders feared that local businesses, jobs, and tax bases would shrink as motorists and truck drivers bypassed their cities and towns. For this reason, Congress prohibited new Interstate System rest areas from offering commercial services, such as food and convenience items. Since then, businesses have clustered near the Interstates at the interchanges to provide these services to Interstate travelers. Given how many businesses are located off of Interstate exits, it is one of the most competitive business environments in the country.

Today, our roads and bridges are in dire need of improvement, and the diverse group of organizations that have signed this letter all strongly support investment in our nation’s infrastructure. Infrastructure has long been considered an economic driver and a job creator. Commercializing rest areas would eliminate jobs, while at the same time undercutting a number of important policy priorities that affect various sectors of the economy.

- **Commercialized Rest Areas Will Hurt Private Businesses**

While at first glance rest area commercialization seems like an easy and convenient way to generate revenue, the fact is it does not generate any *new* infrastructure or tax revenue; instead, it simply *transfers* sales away from the current competitive environment off highway exits to state coffers and the business contractor that pays the largest amount to rent the location on the shoulder of the highway. It would jeopardize private off-highway businesses, including many small businesses that for the last 60 years have operated under the current law and invested in and established locations at the highway exits based on that law. Due to their advantageous locations, state-owned commercial rest areas would establish virtual monopolies on the sale of services to highway travelers. Commercial activity will be diverted from off-highway communities to on-Interstate locations, redirecting tax revenue from localities to state capitals.

When the government competes with private business in this way, it results in a monopoly, undermining the free market and raising prices for consumers.

- **Commercialized Rest Areas Threaten Cities and Towns**

In many rural communities located near Interstates, gas stations, restaurants, convenience stores, truck stops, and hotels represent the largest local taxpayers, contributing more than \$22.5 billion in state and local taxes. These funds help support schools, police and fire departments and other vital public services.

Commercializing rest areas would destroy the property tax base of local governments and put out of business many companies that have invested in creating a business model based on access to the Interstate. The damage to thousands of local businesses means the cities and towns that rely on those businesses for tax revenues will be further challenged to make up a substantial budgetary shortfall.

- **Commercialized Rest Areas Hurt Consumers**

Prices are significantly higher at existing state-owned commercial rest areas than off-highway competitors because the state, contractor, and leasing vendor all take a piece of product sales. Additionally, the lack of viable competition will eliminate any downward pressure on prices. This stands in stark contrast to exit-based businesses, which operate in one of the most competitive environments in the United States, often competing with multiple other entities in close proximity to one another.

- **Commercialized Rest Areas Threaten the Livelihood of Blind Entrepreneurs**

Businesses that are owned by blind entrepreneurs currently enjoy a priority for installing and operating vending machines at Interstate rest areas. Many blind business owners throughout the country rely on this opportunity to earn a living, support their families, and realize the American dream. If commercial rest areas are allowed, use of these vending machines could be expected to fall precipitously, resulting in hundreds of blind entrepreneurs being put out of work virtually overnight.

- **Commercialized Rest Areas Discourage Investment in Alternative Fuels**

The best way to achieve investment in a full range of fueling options for consumers is to incentivize private, off-highway businesses to invest in these technologies. Making available electric vehicle charging stations or other alternative fuels such as hydrogen or natural gas at Interstate rest areas is a commercial service. Congress prohibited

states from offering commercial services at Interstate rest areas specifically so that private sector entities would grow and provide those services to travelers.

As with any other product, our position against offering alternative fuels and automotive services at Interstate rest areas reflects the off-highway business community's desire for an environment where private businesses are encouraged to make investments in these technologies. In fact, many off-highway businesses have invested significant resources in alternative fuels such as electric vehicle charging infrastructure, biofuels, hydrogen, and natural gas. If such alternative fuels were made available at rest areas on the Interstate right-of-way, it would discourage the private sector from making such investments and ultimately hinder growth in these alternative fuels.

- **Commercial Rest Areas Constrict Truck Parking Capacity**

Commercial rest areas diminish truck parking capacity, threatening a Congressional objective to increase truck parking availability nationwide. Private truck stops and travel plazas located at the Interstate exits provide 90 percent of all truck parking in the United States, mostly free of charge, and need a healthy business climate to operate and expand. When states are permitted to provide commercial services at their rest areas, private businesses either go out of business or, at the least, will not invest in expanded facilities. This will result in a net loss in truck parking capacity.

In conclusion, commercializing Interstate rest areas would create far more problems than it will solve. States and local communities will suffer when exit-based businesses and the jobs they support have to cut workers and potentially close; hard-working business owners will lose out on a significant portion of their customer bases; blind entrepreneurs will be out of work; and truck drivers will have a harder time finding a safe place to rest.

We strongly urge you to oppose efforts to commercialize Interstate rest areas.

Sincerely,

NATSO, Representing America's Travel Centers and Truck Stops

Asian American Hotel Owners Association

Energy Marketers of America

Franchise Business Services

International Franchise Association

National Association of Convenience Stores

National Automatic Merchandising Association

National Federation of the Blind

National Franchise Association

National League of Cities

National Retail Federation

National Tank Truck Carriers

SIGMA: America's Leading Fuel Marketers

The Transport Project