

TAXPAYERS GET THEIR KICKS ON ROUTE 66

QUICK STATS

- ✘ **CONFERENCE:** Spending
- ✘ **TEAM:** National Park Service
- **FUMBLE:** \$287,000 annually to support the Route 66 Preservation Program
- **HOW TO RECOVER THE BALL:** Eliminate the Route 66 Preservation Program



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According to the American Society of Civil Engineers, Americans spend the equivalent of \$101 billion every year on wasted time and fuel on congested major urban highways, in large part due to a lack of capital investment.³³⁹ On roads controlled by the Federal Highway System that cross lands controlled by federal agencies such as the Forest Service, National Parks, and Corps of Engineer properties, the federal government has accrued an \$11.55 billion deferred maintenance backlog.³⁴⁰

Yet in 2015 a federal grant program provided \$20,565 to restore an architectural neon sign at a motel adjacent to Historic Route 66. The grant originated from the Route 66 Preservation Program, an NPS program that provides \$287,000³⁴¹ annually in grants for the

“restoration of restaurants, motels, gas stations and neon signs, as well as for planning, research, and educational initiatives.”³⁴² While this program represents a drop in the bucket compared to the massive shortfalls cited above, it does highlight Congress’s inability to learn lessons many parents work to teach their children: the difference between “wants” and “needs.”

In 1999 the Route 66 Preservation Program began as a temporary, ten-year grant program to help jumpstart preservation efforts on Route 66. Since 2001, more than 100 grants have been issued for projects along the iconic Route 66 corridor. Federal backing of the program was originally scheduled to terminate in 2009 and transition to a non-federal entity. However, in 2008 the once-temporary program was extended for an additional 10 years, protecting it and its low-priority spending through 2019.

This year’s projects include a \$25,000 grant for the “Women on the Mother Road: Route 66 Interactive Website and Oral History Project,” \$20,565 for the Boots Court Roof Restoration in Carthage, MO, and \$30,800 for structural restoration to the 1950s Lake Shore Motel, currently known as the Best Budget Inn, in Carthage MO. Grants were also awarded to renovate an abandoned gas station in Oklahoma and a theatre production in Arizona. The program has spent more than \$200,000 to

restore neon road signs, like the one mentioned above.³⁴³

Route 66 is an iconic highway that should and will remain an important part in the American story. However, its historical and cultural significance does not depend on taxpayer support for refurbishing roadside attractions.

For more information, please visit:

[GPO: Route 66 Corridor, U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Report](#)

[NPS: H.R. 146 Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009](#)

[NPS: Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program](#)

RECOVERY

Congress should cancel further appropriations for the program and transition the service to a non-federal entity, which was supposed to occur six years ago. Fortunately, there are at least 15 organizations dedicated to Route 66 that are ready to carry the torch of preserving America's Mother Road.³⁴⁴