An urban forest issue brief

Green Streets

Greener Streets are Safer Streets
Trees and landscape features are often perceived by transportation officials as a safety risk. However, evidence from national and local studies reveal that the inclusion of trees and other streetscape features may actually reduce crashes and injuries on roadways.

Tree-lined Streets...
- Are safer.
- Cost less to maintain.
- Reduce traffic congestion.
- Mitigate air and noise pollution.

Community benefits from roadside landscapes:

Calmer traffic. Research done in several states has shown that motorists benefit from vertical features such as trees and buildings to gauge their speed. Three-fourths of Americans believe that being smarter about development and improving public transportation are better long-term solutions for reducing traffic congestion than building new roads.¹

Less maintenance costs. All other factors equal, the condition of pavement on tree-shaded streets is better than on unshaded streets. In fact, shaded roads require significantly less maintenance and can save up to 60% of repaving costs over 30 years. That’s a lot of savings considering the four million miles of roadways in this country (approximately 1% of the total area of the contiguous U.S.).²

Healthier residents. Human health effects from air pollution usually involve respiratory functions and can be quite severe. Studies show that trees and shrubs have the greatest impact at minimizing harmful automotive outputs. Not only are trees prettier to look at than asphalt and industrial areas, but also trees reduce noise pollution by acting as buffers. Let’s turn all highways into greenways.³

Recommendations:
- Prioritize space and location for trees in the highway and streetscape design process.
- Incorporate stormwater management techniques like bioswales and infiltration planters.
- Update highway and streetscape standards to improve conditions for trees.
- Support H.R. 6435, the ‘National Highway Chokepoint Congestion Relief Act,’ specifically the provision that includes trees and green infrastructure as eligible capital improvements.
- Support an amendment to H.R. 1780 or H.R. 1329 to specifically includes tree planting as an eligible project for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from mobile sources.
- Support an amendment to S. 238— the ‘Build America Bonds Act of 2009’— to specifically include nonprofit organizations working to improve our national transportation systems through the planting of trees and green infrastructure as qualified participants and projects.

References:
3 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.