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## The Tea Party's Selective Disdain for Transportation Subsidies

by [Angie Schmitt](#)

Does the Tea Party hate transportation subsidies or not? Sometimes it can be difficult to tell.



U.S. taxpayers subsidize flights to places like Escanaba, Michigan (airport pictured) up to and exceeding \$1,000 per passenger through a program Tea Party Republicans just helped preserve, despite their supposed hatred for transportation subsidies. Photo: [Waymarking.com](#)

Here we have the Reason Foundation [howling](#) about \$1 million for Capital Bikeshare. And last week self-styled GOP budget hawks successfully [wrested away](#) federal funds from bike and pedestrian projects on the grounds that such programs are “wasteful.”

But wait! [Bloomberg](#) reported that in the same week House Tea Party Republicans voted to maintain a \$214 million program that subsidizes air travel to towns like Huron, South Dakota and Scottsbluff, Nebraska — something that folks at the [Cato Institute](#) and fellow Republicans have argued is an unconscionable use of taxpayer money.

According to the [Associated Press](#):

Tea party lawmakers from rural areas were among those fighting the hardest to preserve taxpayer subsidies for airline flights into and out of small towns last year after senior Republicans tried to eliminate the oft-criticized program. Now, the House Appropriations Committee is awarding the program an 11 percent

budget hike. Next year, the subsidies would reach a record \$214 million under a bill the GOP-run committee approved Tuesday.

The subsidies can reach hundreds of dollars per ticket — and can exceed \$1,000 in a few routes. A recent change to the program will soon take care of such \$1,000-plus cases, but critics of the program say more needs to be done to shelter taxpayers from runaway costs.

Network blog [Systemic Failure](#) says there couldn't be a better example of hypocrisy on transportation policy:

You've heard of the bridge-to-nowhere and the train-to-nowhere. There is also the "[plane to nowhere](#)." This is the same Congress which eliminated high-speed rail funding, and severely cut bike/ped programs. Unlike the "essential" air services program, high-speed trains and bike paths don't require operating subsidies.

I, for one, will be holding my breath until the folks at Reason write a scathing denouncement of this program. Or could it be that they don't really hate subsidies as much as the idea of providing services used primarily by city-dwellers? Stay tuned.

Elsewhere on the Network today: [Pedestrian Observations](#) outlines "Plan B" for California High Speed Rail. [Bike Delaware](#) reports that the state's general assembly approved a watershed \$13.25 million for bike and pedestrian spending. And [A View from the Cycle Path](#) looks at the decoupling of bike and car infrastructure.