



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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ADOT AND AASHTO PROPOSE SIPHONING JOBS AND CUSTOMERS FROM SMALL TOWN BUSINESS TO FIX STATE BUDGET

Alexandria, Va:

Statement by NATSO President and CEO Lisa Mullings:

“In a recent video press release issued by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, the Arizona Department of Transportation proposes that states should compete with small-town businesses, siphoning jobs and customers to fix state budget shortfalls, by establishing commercial rest areas along the Interstate right-of-way.

Congress outlawed commercial activities at interstate rest areas to foster competition and the growth of local communities near the Interstate Highway System. Today, this policy continues to promote a vigorous competitive environment. In Arizona alone, nearly 1,200 businesses are located within a quarter mile of an interstate highway, employing more than 31,000 people. Nationally, 97,000 businesses, including truckstops, gas stations, convenience stores and restaurants, thrive along the Interstate Highway System, employing 2.2 million Americans.

ADOT’s plan to overturn this law and allow commercial rest areas would drain local businesses of customers, jobs and local tax revenues by putting established businesses in direct competition with the state. At the same time, it would give the state an unfair competitive advantage by granting the state direct access to highway motorists.

Arizona’s plan represents a deliberate attempt to set up businesses on the Interstate right-of-way with full awareness that there are no new dollars or new traffic on the Interstate Highway System.

State budgets nationwide are stressed because of the economic downturn. But addressing those budget problems by adopting measures harmful to small town businesses and local communities is counterproductive and stands to create more problems in the long-term than they solve.

State financial budget problems are not a burden that should be handed to local business owners and local communities. Now is not the time to threaten businesses that will suffer in the form of lost jobs and property taxes used to support schools, police, fire and other public services.

Despite claims that commercial rest areas represent a positive public-private partnership, the reality is they represent state-controlled monopolies on travelers’ food, beverage, retail and fuel purchases because they alone will enjoy the best, easiest-to-access locations. Well-established local businesses that rely on motorists exiting the interstates will no longer be able to compete.

What's more, while nearby businesses are left to flounder, consumers will pay hidden taxes in the form of higher costs for goods and services at commercialized rest areas as the large multi-national corporations contracted to run them seek to recoup investments and turn a profit for shareholders and the state.”