

## **Transportation Committee Policies & Priorities**

Regional councils plan how the nation's transportation system will function in the future, provide for citizen engagement, and help set national and local transportation goals and priorities. Federal transportation legislation should reflect the important role of regional councils.

**The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC)** supports a multimodal federal transportation program that increases funding and authority for regional organizations and local governments. NARC supports Councils of Governments (COGs), Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs), and Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs) – collectively referred to in this document as regional councils/MPOs – and their role in transportation planning; project prioritization and programming; and promoting regional solutions that support economic growth, mobility, environmental sustainability, and resilience.

### **SURFACE TRANSPORTATION**

The current federal surface transportation authorization law – *Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act* – provides funding for the nation's extensive network of highways, public transportation systems, bikeways, pedestrian facilities, and intercity passenger rail. Regional councils/MPOs are central in the planning and programming of federal funds that support these investments.

Adequate funding for surface transportation is crucial, but in recent years has become a significant challenge. For decades, the federal Highway Trust Fund (HTF) was supported almost solely by fuel taxes, but since 2008 has required billions in General Fund transfers to remain solvent. Over time, increasing construction costs have eroded the purchasing power of the federal fuel taxes, which have not been increased since 1993, while improved fuel economy means drivers contribute a smaller share to the HTF. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates the HTF requires an additional \$188 billion in the next decade to maintain current funding levels. Without an increase in dedicated transportation funding, this so-called funding cliff will increase, creating a serious impediment to future reauthorization efforts.

As a result, the federal government is struggling to invest adequately in the nation's transportation network and regional councils/MPOs are faced with doing more with too little funding. The scope and complexity of transportation planning has increased significantly, including new performance-based planning requirements, rapidly changing vehicle technology and micromobility, and changing job access and mobility needs. Additional federal funding, in particular to support planning at the regional level, would improve the capacity of regional councils/MPOs to meet these and other challenges, and support local and regional economies through the multimodal movement of people, goods, and services. Federal assistance should also help regional councils/MPOs promote livable communities by allowing better integration of transportation, economic development, housing, land use, and environment sustainability.

### **Surface Transportation Recommendations:**

#### **Funding and Financing**

- Increase and index federal fuel taxes in the near-term and encourage the search for new and additional revenue sources – such as a per-mile user fee – to provide sustainable, predictable, and adequate funding into the future.
- Federal funding – whether derived from user fees, made available through the appropriations process, or as part of a separate infrastructure package – should, to the maximum extent possible, be distributed through existing formula funding channels with the greatest possible share going directly to local areas to decide how it will be spent.
- Eliminate redundant and duplicative programs to ensure funds are spent most efficiently.
- Increase overall funding levels for federal transportation programs, in particular for the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP), Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), and Metropolitan Planning (PL).
- Increase funding and authority for RTPOs and RPOs and increase their role in the planning process by strengthening their relationship with regional councils/MPOs and state DOTs.
- Fully fund, through appropriations, the levels provided in authorization legislation.

- Encourage innovative approaches to transportation financing, allow federal funds to leverage other funding sources, and enable flexible and innovative local financing options, particularly for local matching funds.
- Explicitly allow regional councils/MPOs to use and benefit from new financing mechanisms, where appropriate.
- Preserve existing discretionary grant programs – particularly BUILD – and maintain local and regional benefits, such as economic development, as the basis for funding decisions. Prohibit funding decisions based on the share of funding a local sponsor can provide. Institute reforms to require more transparent decision-making in the process of choosing grant recipients.
- Remove the current federal tolling prohibition, leaving states to decide if tolling existing Interstates is appropriate.
- Authorize Regional Infrastructure Improvement Zones (RIIZs), a federal tax code change to allow businesses and individuals to make tax deductible contributions toward a regionally-approved infrastructure project.
- Increase flexibility within CMAQ to provide 100% funding for a wider variety of projects.
- Ensure state rules and requirements do not reduce or limit efficient expenditure of federal transportation funding, including planning funding.

### Planning

- Maintain regional planning and programming as cornerstones of federal transportation policy.
- Update the regional planning process to make it more responsive to current and emerging opportunities and challenges, including technology, data, and resilience. Provide regional councils/MPOs and RTPOs with authority, data, and funding to meet these challenges within their communities.
- Strengthen local elected officials’ role in transportation decision-making through regional councils/MPOs, RTPOs, and RTOs; increase local governments’ authority to employ solutions at the regional level; and provide regions and local governments the direct authority, flexibility, and funding to create a safe and efficient transportation system.
- Provide flexibility in determining MPO boundaries and the make-up and structure of MPO policy boards.
- Support a multimodal transportation system. Provide adequate, dedicated funding for public transportation improvements from the HTF, including the New Starts and Small Starts programs; revise federal requirements for local match and eligibility of federal funds for engineering work to eliminate the disadvantage between transit and highway projects; and provide robust, dedicated funding for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.
- Add non-traditional and emerging technologies to the list of eligible project types under the STBGP, to ensure they are considered during the regional prioritization process.
- Emphasize livable communities and encourage the integration of objectives involving transportation, economic development, housing, land use, and environment sustainability.
- Expedite project delivery and eliminate or consolidate duplicative or redundant processes; and recognize regional councils/MPOs, RTPOs, and RPOs as full partners in expediting project delivery.
- Integrate resilience as a core consideration in planning and project prioritization. Provide funding and authority for planning and implementation of projects to increase system resilience, including making drainage projects to reduce flooding an eligible expense. Increase coordination of federal approaches to resilience across agencies.
- Support efforts to enhance the consideration of housing and land use in the planning and project prioritization process.

### Goods Movement

- Recognize the importance of freight and intermodal freight connections and the essential role of regional councils/MPOs in issues related to freight movement.
- Require regional council/MPO and RTPO representation on state Freight Advisory Committees.
- Empower regional councils/MPOs to prioritize freight investments within the context of transportation, economic development, and environmental planning and promote connectivity across modes and access to the National Highway System.
- Suballocate National Highway Freight Program (NHFP) funding to regional councils/MPOs and ensure they are explicitly eligible to utilize any new dedicated freight funding sources.
- Allow for adequate construction and maintenance of the landside infrastructure that accesses the nation’s ports and recognizes and funds planning and construction of intermodal facilities to support these operations.

### Safety

- Expand opportunities for regional councils/MPOs to ensure the safety of all system users.
- Suballocate Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funding to MPOs and RTPOs for local prioritization.

- Recognize regional councils/MPOs as leaders in safety and security; address inconsistencies involving their participation in safety and security planning; and better incorporate regional planning into disaster and resiliency planning.
- Expand project eligibility to ensure non-driving modes are better protected, including planning and projects for Vision Zero.

### Technology and Data

- Provide authority and funding to prepare regions and local governments for connected and automated vehicles and related infrastructure, including preparing for workforce impacts of automated vehicles and other emerging technology.
- Provide federal assistance with data on access to jobs and educational opportunities to ensure more equitable and efficient project prioritization.
- Continue to provide federal data sources to support regional and local planning.
- Empower regional councils/MPOs to collaborate and engage on planning efforts incorporating emerging data and intelligent transportation systems (ITS) technologies, connected vehicle technologies, and other smart mobility-related efforts (such as the federal Smart Cities Program), and ensure regional councils/MPOs are explicitly eligible to utilize this funding.
- Ensure regional organizations, local governments, and public transportation agencies have free access to data – especially safety data and vehicle data collected by vehicle manufacturers and wireless communication carriers – to improve planning and maximize public benefit.
- Encourage and enable data sharing between all levels of government.
- Empower local governments to enact policies about emerging technologies, including automated vehicles. Do not preempt local authority, to ensure policies are consistent with local mobility goals.

### Implementation and Rulemaking

- Recognize the burden that federal requirements place on regional councils/MPOs and work to implement each federal requirement in a manner that reduces this burden to the greatest extent possible.
- Maintain the autonomy of regional councils/MPOs and consider the importance of locally-defined policies and priorities.

## **AVIATION**

Aviation programs enhance mobility, support regional economies, and provide efficient movement of goods, services, and people. Regional councils/MPOs and local governments can coordinate aviation activities with other land use, economic development, and transportation factors, and federal aviation policy should capitalize on this capacity.

### **Aviation Recommendations:**

- Strengthen federal partnership with local governments and regions to address aviation issues and engage directly with local elected officials, who best understand the local needs, opportunities, and obligations of their communities.
- Delay implementation of Real ID requirements, require States to expedite the issuance of Real IDs, and enlist the cooperation of TSA and airlines to alert the public about the Real ID requirement of Real IDs.
- Establish a robust partnership with local governments and their regional councils/MPOs to more fully deploy Regional Airport Systems Plans (RASPs). Prioritize funding for airport projects consistent with RASPs.
- Ensure regional authority in aviation decision-making; streamline the federal role where local governments have the capacity to operate and maintain airport facilities; recognize local control of land-use decisions pertaining to air and noise pollution control; and increase authority to work in conjunction with airport operators to impose and enforce rates and charges and make decisions on revenue spending for airport development, capital financing, and operations.
- Obligate funds annually from the Airport and Airway Trust Fund without delay, remove the Airport and Airway Trust Fund from the federal unified budget, and use it for dedicated purposes only.
- Provide robust and sustained funding for the Airport Improvement Program (AIP),<sup>2</sup> which provides grant funding to public agencies for planning and developing public-use airports and helps build the capacity to handle future growth. Eligible projects include runways, terminals, and other enhancements designed to improve airport safety, capacity, security, and environmental impacts.
- Provide robust and sustained funding for the Essential Air Services (EAS) Program, which subsidizes air carriers that maintain a minimal level of service to certain small communities that might otherwise not receive air service.

- Provide robust and sustained funding for the Small Community Air Service Development (SCASD) Program, which provides assistance to enhance air service to small communities.
- Authorize and expand funding for FAA airport capital development programs.
- Allow for the continued collection of passenger facilities charges (PFCs) by public agencies that control commercial airports and increase the cap for PFCs for the nation’s airports to allow them to raise revenue to modernize facilities.
- Provide funding to ensure security at commercial and general aviation airports. This funding should not be taken from other essential programs nor should the financial burden of security requirements be imposed on local governments and regional organizations.

### **INTERCITY PASSENGER RAIL**

Intercity passenger rail is a critical component of our nation’s multimodal transportation system. Amtrak is the only intercity connection for many small and rural communities and supports corridors that are used by many local and regional service providers. Amtrak and other passenger rail are key elements of livable communities and emergency and evacuation planning and provide a fuel-efficient way to connect communities and provide access to jobs and commerce. High-speed rail drives economic expansion and efficiently connects urban and rural regions, people, and businesses.

#### **Intercity Passenger Rail Recommendations:**

- Support nationwide, intercity passenger rail service with sufficient and sustained funding for Amtrak and other qualified recipients, including high- and higher-speed rail, allowing for maintenance and operation, modernization, and expansion to enhance service, promote safety, improve economic development, and support metropolitan and non-metropolitan opportunities to expand rail service.
- Encourage and enable public-private partnerships to generate investment capital for rail infrastructure and operations, for example through the redevelopment of major rail stations.
- Strengthen federal partnership with local governments and regions to address passenger rail and Amtrak issues, such as redevelopment of major Amtrak stations in central business districts and projects to ensure connectivity with local and regional transit systems.
- Engage directly with local elected officials, who best understand the local needs, opportunities, and obligations of their communities.
- Provide for regional-scale collaboration for the planning and expansion of passenger rail infrastructure and support cooperative agreements between Amtrak and commuter rail systems.

### **PORTS AND INLAND WATERWAYS**

Ports and inland waterways are crucial to an integrated, intermodal transportation system, the nation’s economic well-being, and homeland security.

#### **Ports and Inland Waterways Recommendations:**

- Provide adequate, long-term funding for ports and inland waterways projects.
- Distribute annually all funds collected through the Harbor Maintenance Tax for harbor maintenance projects and allow for full utilization of the Inland Waterways Trust Fund.
- Protect the nation and its regions with proactive measures that increase the security – including cybersecurity – of ports and waterways.