

## COUNTY PRIORITIES FOR MAP-21 REAUTHORIZATION

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Counties play a critical role in the nation's transportation system. They are responsible for building and maintaining 230,690 bridges and 45 percent of all public roads (compared to the 32 percent of public roads owned by cities and townships, 19 percent by states, and 3 percent by the federal government), and are involved in a third of the nation's transit systems and airports that connect residents, communities and businesses.

The National Association of Counties (NACo) recently conducted an analysis of county transportation funding sources, challenges and solutions across 48 states, which revealed that federal and state funding for county transportation projects is increasingly inadequate to meet current and projected needs. Between 1998 and 2011, the share of federal and state funding to local governments for highways decreased by 10 percent while the cost of construction, labor and materials increased by 44 percent. At the same time, states impose numerous limitations on counties' ability to raise revenue for transportation, such as the property tax or local gas taxes. In fact, only 29 states allow counties to collect local option sales taxes for transportation purposes or general purposes including transportation.

The latest federal surface transportation law, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) further limits the allocation of funds to local governments. While local governments own 43 percent of the federal-aid highway system, local areas receive a suballocation that is equal to 16 percent of the MAP-21 National Highway Performance Program (NHPP) and the Surface Transportation Program (STP) funding for federal-aid highways. A combination of federal budget cuts, the effect of the recession on state government budgets and the fixed gas tax nature of state and federal highway funding are contributing to a widening gap in transportation funding available to counties.

**With MAP-21 set to expire on September 30, 2014 and the Highway Trust Fund nearing a major fiscal cliff, NACo urges Congress to fix the Highway Trust Fund and pass a long-term surface transportation bill (preferably six years in length) that provides sufficient funding and supports counties' surface transportation priorities.**

### County surface transportation priorities for the reauthorization of MAP-21:

- **Provide Long-Term Funding Certainty:** Support passage of a new surface transportation authorization that provides long-term funding certainty by raising the federal gas tax or finding alternative sources of revenue to make the Highway Trust Fund solvent.
- **Increase Funding for County Road and Bridge Projects:** Support county road and bridge projects by: 1) maintaining the set-aside for off-system bridges and continuing states' ability to reduce the set-aside requirement if there are insufficient off-system bridge needs; and 2) providing more funding for locally-owned on-system roads and bridges by increasing the overall funding level for the Surface Transportation Program (STP) and continuing the STP suballocation to local areas but increasing the share to greater than 50 percent.

- **Increase the Role of Counties in Statewide Planning:** Provide an increased role for counties in statewide transportation planning by: 1) requiring that state departments of transportation, at a minimum, *cooperate* with local government officials (including county transportation officials) in the development of planning and funding allocation processes, including the development of State Strategic Highway Safety Plans; and 2) requiring that state departments of transportation *coordinate* with local government officials in defining the term ‘high risk rural road’ – or developing a federal definition of the term ‘high risk rural road’ after considering input from state and local stakeholders and other performance measurements.
- **Build on Reforms from MAP-21 that Strive to Expedite Project Delivery:** Continue and expand efforts to streamline and expedite project delivery by: 1) maintaining the categorical exclusion for projects receiving limited federal assistance (\$5 million or less); and 2) simplifying the process for pursuing categorical exclusions.
- **Support Public Transportation Systems of all Sizes:** Support rural, small and large transit systems by: 1) continuing to fund transit programs through the Mass Transit Account of the Highway Trust Fund; 2) continuing federal funding for rural transportation systems; 3) continuing and expanding transit operators’ flexibility to use federal dollars for operating assistance; 4) restoring historic funding levels for the Bus and Bus Facilities program and revising the program to require that all funds for Urbanized Areas with a population of 50,000 or more be apportioned directly to the designated recipients of 5307 funding; and 5) providing discretionary funding for both rural and urban transit systems to address one-time and/or major investments.
- **Make Safety a Priority on all Roads and Bridges:** Emphasize safety on all roads and bridges by: 1) revising the High Risk Rural Road (HRRR) safety rule under the Highway Safety Improvement Program, which requires an increase in existing fatality rates on HRRR over a two-year period before a state must obligate funds to improve rural road safety – rather than waiting for safety problems to get worse, states should either be required or incentivized to decrease existing fatality rates on HRRR through safety investments; 2) prioritizing investments for federal-aid bridges to address safety and infrastructure improvements for bridges with the greatest need – regardless of whether they are on or off the National Highway System; and 3) continuing existing limits on truck size and weight due to the enormous threat larger and heavier trucks pose to road safety and locally-owned infrastructure.
- **Support Innovative Funding and Financing Methods:** Continue and encourage alternative financing methods that help local governments stretch federal, state and local investments farther by: 1) continuing robust funding for the TIFIA program; 2) incentivizing innovative project funding and financing through an increased federal match (up to 100 percent) or by allowing local governments to use savings realized through innovative contracting methods toward their local match; and 3) creating a pilot program or providing technical assistance to local governments that support the planning for and design of multi-jurisdictional project bundling.
- **Invest in Passenger Rail:** Include funding for passenger rail in the reauthorization of MAP-21 that supports current rail service and the development of high-speed rail.

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