



Transportation Committee Policies & Priorities

Regional councils play a critical role in the nation's transportation system. They plan how the 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 importance 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), and Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs) – collectively referred to as regional councils – and their role in transportation planning; project prioritization and programming; and promoting regional solutions that support economic growth, mobility, and environmental sustainability.

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 interstates, highways, roads, transit systems, bikeways, pedestrian facilities, and passenger rail and Amtrak. Regional councils 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 increasing fleet efficiency means drivers contribute a smaller share to the HTF.

As a result, regional councils are doing more with too little funding. Additional federal funding would improve the capacity of regional councils to support local and regional economies through the multimodal movement of people, goods, and services.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen federal partnership with local governments and regions to address transportation issues; 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.
- Strengthen local elected officials' role in transportation decision-making. The federal government should engage directly with local elected officials, who best understand their communities' needs, opportunities, and obligations.
- Maintain regional planning and programming as cornerstones of federal transportation policy. For more than a half-century, regional planning and coordination have created a multimodal transportation system and advanced the integration of urban, suburban, and rural interests.
- Increase transportation funding at all levels of government; appropriations bills should fully fund the levels provided in authorization legislation for all transportation modes.
- Increase and index federal fuel taxes in the near-term while exploring new revenue sources that will provide sustainable and predictable funding in the longer-term. Redundant and duplicative programs within the transportation program should be eliminated where appropriate.
- 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 to use and benefit from new financing mechanisms.

- Empower regional councils to collaborate and engage on planning efforts incorporating emerging data and intelligent transportation systems (ITS) technologies, connected vehicle technologies, and other Smart City-related efforts, and ensure regional councils are explicitly eligible to utilize this funding.
- Recognize regional councils 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.
- Empower regional councils to coordinate freight interests within the context of transportation, economic development, and environmental planning; provide consistent, dedicated, and firewalled freight funding; and ensure regional councils are explicitly allowed to utilize this funding.
- Emphasize livable communities and encourage the integration of objectives involving transportation, economic development, housing, land use, and environment sustainability.
- Continue federal leadership in data, research, and technology, particularly as they relate to the needs of local governments and their regional councils.

Expedite project delivery and eliminate duplicative or redundant processes; and recognize MPOs and RPOs as full partners in expediting project delivery.

NARC Supports Federal Surface Transportation Reauthorization That:

- Increases the overall funding levels of federal transportation programs. Congress should increase and index federal fuel taxes and encourage the search for new and additional revenue sources to provide sustainable and predictable funding into the future.
- Increases the suballocated share of the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP) and Transportation Alternatives (TA).
- Increases funding for metropolitan planning (PL).
- Provides flexibility in determining MPO boundaries.
- Requires MPO representation on Freight Advisory Committees.
- Increases flexibility within CMAQ to provide 100% funding for a wider variety of projects.
- Distributes a large share of the available funding through formula grants.
- Authorizes 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.

NARC Supports Federal Transportation Implementation That:

- Results in rulemakings that are timely, thoroughly vetted, and well-reasoned.
- Recognizes the burden that federal requirements places on regional councils and MPOs, and works to implement each federal requirement in a manner that reduces this burden to the greatest extent possible.
- Creates federal performance measures that maintain the autonomy of MPOs and take into account the importance of locally-defined policies and priorities. Federal performance regulations should be developed to recognize the importance of multimodal connectivity; respect the balance regional councils make between a multitude of factors including cost, safety, resiliency, environmental impact, and community input; and should take into account the breadth of issues that regional councils are responsible for that are interwoven with transportation, including economic development, land use, and more.

AVIATION

Aviation programs enhance mobility; support regional economies and transportation needs; and serve as a catalyst for efficient movement of goods, services, and people. Regional councils 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.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen federal partnership with local governments and regions to address aviation issues.
- Engage directly with local elected officials, who best understand the local needs, opportunities, and obligations of their communities.
- Establish a robust partnership with local governments and their regional councils to more fully deploy Regional Airport Systems Plans (RASPs).
- Ensure regional authority in aviation decision-making; streamline the federal role in instances 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.

NARC Supports Federal Aviation Authorization Legislation That:

- Obligates funds annually from the aviation trust fund without delay; removes the aviation trust fund from the federal unified budget; and uses the aviation trust fund for dedicated purposes only.
- Provides robust and sustained funding for the Airport Improvement Program (AIP), which provides grant funding to public agencies for planning and developing public-use airports, and help 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.
- Provides 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.
- Provides robust and sustained funding for the Small Community Air Service Development (SCASD) Program, which provides assistance to enhance air service to small communities.
- Authorizes and expands funding for FAA airport capital development programs.
- Allows for the continued collection of passenger facilities charges (PFCs) by public agencies that control commercial airports.
- Prioritizes funding for airport projects consistent with RASPs.
- Provides sufficient 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 and regional governments.

AMTRAK AND PASSENGER RAIL

Passenger rail is a critical component of our nation's multimodal transportation system and contributes to the nation's economic well-being. 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 provides 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.

Recommendations:

- Support nationwide passenger rail service with sufficient and sustained funding for Amtrak, passenger rail, and high speed rail, allowing for expansion, capital improvements, and operations support to enhance service, promote safety, and improve economic development, and respecting state and local authority and private concerns.
- Strengthen federal partnership with local governments and regions to address passenger rail and Amtrak issues.
- 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.

NARC Supports Federal Passenger Rail Legislation That:

- Funds Amtrak and passenger rail to meet local and regional needs, including capital and operational needs.
- Establishes a sustainable funding mechanism to continue broad-based, nation-wide passenger rail service, including funding metropolitan and non-metropolitan opportunities to expand rail service.
- Encourages and enables public-private partnerships to generate investment capital for rail infrastructure and operations.
- Invests in high-speed rail.

PORTS AND WATERWAYS

Ports and waterways are crucial to an integrated, intermodal transportation system; the nation's economic well-being; and protecting the homeland.

NARC Supports Federal Ports and Waterways Legislation That:

- Creates a national, intermodal freight policy to improve the reliability and efficiency of freight movement and the transportation system overall.
- Recognizes the importance of freight and intermodal freight connections and the essential role of regional councils in issues related to freight movement. MPOs and regional councils must be partners in the development of a federal freight program and any federal efforts to create programs to increase freight movement and efficiency, including access to funding.
- Provides long-term, increased funding for surface transportation legislation that: allows 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.
- Annually distribute all funds collected through the Harbor Maintenance Tax for harbor maintenance projects and allow for full utilization of the Inland Waterways Trust Fund.
- Protects the nation and its regions with proactive measures that increase the security – including cybersecurity – of ports and waterways.