



Transportation Committee Policies & Priorities

Regional councils play a critical role in the nation's transportation system. They help plan how the system will function in the future; provide an opportunity for citizen engagement; and help set national transportation goals and priorities. Federal transportation programs should reflect the important role of regional councils.

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports a multi-modal federal transportation program that increases funding and authority for regions and local governments. Further, NARC supports the role of Councils of Governments (COGs), Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), and Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs) – collectively referred to as regional councils – in transportation planning and project prioritization and programming, to promote regional solutions that support economic growth, mobility, and environmental sustainability.

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION

The current federal surface transportation authorization law – *Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century* (MAP-21) – provides funding for the nation's extensive network of interstates, highways, roads, transit systems, bikeways, and pedestrian facilities. Regional councils play a crucial role in the planning and programming of federal funds that support these investments. This portion of the nation's overall transportation system is essential to fostering strong national, regional, and local economies.

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 asked to do more with too little funding. Additional federal funding would help improve the capacity of regional councils to support regional economies through the multimodal movement of people, goods, and services.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen federal partnership with local governments and regions to address critical transportation infrastructure issues.
- Strengthen the role of local elected officials in transportation decision-making. The federal government should engage directly with local elected officials, who best understand the local needs, opportunities, and obligations of their communities.
- Maintain regional planning and programming as cornerstones of federal transportation policy. For more than a half-century, regional planning and coordination have created a multi-modal transportation system and advanced the integration of urban, suburban, and rural interests. Federal policy should provide local and regional governments the direct authority, flexibility, and funding necessary to create a safe and efficient transportation system.
- Increase transportation funding at all levels of government and adjust federal funding mechanisms to ensure adequate resources into the future. Federal fuel taxes should be increased and indexed in the short term while new revenue sources are explored 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, and ensure regional councils are allowed to use and benefit from new financing mechanisms.
- Recognize regional councils as leaders in safety and security. Inconsistencies involving their participation in safety and security planning must be addressed, and federal policies should better incorporate regional planning into disaster and resiliency planning.
- Support the professional experience of MPOs in performance management when creating federal performance measures, and ensure MPOs have a flexible set of metrics that are tied to the regional planning process and incorporate locally-defined policies and priorities.
- Empower regional councils to coordinate freight interests within the context of transportation, economic development, and environmental planning. Consistent, dedicated, and firewalled freight funding is required to meet current and future freight needs.
- Emphasize livable communities and encourage the integration of objectives involving transportation, economic development, environment, land use, and housing.
- Continue federal leadership in data, research, and technology, particularly as they relate to the needs of local governments and their regional planning organizations.
- Expedite project delivery and eliminate bureaucratic red tape and duplicative or redundant processes.

NARC Supports Federal Surface Transportation Reauthorization That:

- Increases the overall funding level of the federal transportation programs, paid for with an increase in federal fuel taxes. Congress should also 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 Program (STP) and Transportation Alternative Program (TAP).
- Provides additional funding for integrated regional plans by increasing funding for metropolitan planning.
- Provides increased authority to local governments to employ solutions at the regional level.
- Recognizes the critical role regional councils play in supporting local, regional, and national economies through planning and implementing of vital transportation projects.
- Incentivizes integrated regional plans by encouraging consideration of transportation projects in the context of housing, economic development, and environmental sustainability.
- Increases implementation and use of innovative financing mechanisms; allows federal funds to leverage other funding sources; and enables flexible and innovative local financing options, particularly as it applies to local matching funds.
- Authorizes Regional Infrastructure Improvement Zones (RIIZs), a change to the federal tax code that would allow businesses and individuals to make tax deductible contributions toward a regionally-approved infrastructure project.

AVIATION

Aviation programs enhance mobility; support the nation's regional transportation needs; serve as a catalyst for efficient movement of goods, services, and people; and support local and regional economies. 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.

NARC supports robust and sustained funding for federal aviation programs, including:

- Airport Improvement Program (AIP), which provides grant funding to public agencies for planning and developing public-use airports. Eligible projects include runways, terminals, and other enhancements designed to improve airport safety, capacity, security, and environmental impacts.
- Essential Air Services Program (EAS), which subsidizes air carriers that maintain a minimal level of service to certain small communities that might otherwise not receive air service.
- Small Community Air Service Development Program (SCASD), which provides assistance to enhance air service to small communities.

Recommendations:

- Continue and strengthen federal partnership with local governments and regions to address critical aviation issues.
- The federal government should engage directly with local elected officials, who best understand the local needs, opportunities, and obligations of their communities.
- The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) should establish a robust partnership with local governments and their regional councils to more fully deploy Regional Airport Systems Plans (RASPs).

NARC Supports Federal Aviation Authorization Legislation That:

- 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 that are consistent with RASPs.
- Maintains and strengthens the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) and allow airports to build the capacity to meet the demands of future growth; authorize and providing robust funding for AIP; obligate funds annually from the aviation trust fund without delay; remove the aviation trust fund from the federal unified budget; and use the aviation trust fund for dedicated purposes only.
- Funds the Essential Air Service (EAS) program and Small Community Air Service Development Program (SCASD).
- Provides sufficient funding to ensure security at commercial and general aviation airports. This funding should not be taken from other essential programs, such as the AIP and EAS, nor should the financial burden of security requirements be imposed on local and regional governments.
- Ensures regional authority in aviation decision-making; streamlines the federal role in instances where local governments have the capacity to operate and maintain airport facilities; recognizes local control of land-use decisions pertaining to air and noise pollution control; and increases authority to work in conjunction with airport operators to impose and enforce rates and charges, as well as make decisions on revenue spending for airport development, capital financing, and operations.

AMTRAK AND PASSENGER RAIL

Passenger rail is a critical component of our nation's multi-modal transportation system and contributes to the economic well-being of the nation. 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. Passenger rail is a fuel-efficient way to connect communities and provide access to jobs and commerce. High-speed rail provides an alternative and rapid way to drive economic expansion and connect 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.
- Continue and strengthen federal partnership with local governments and regions to address critical passenger rail and Amtrak issues. The federal government should 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.
- Amtrak and passenger rail in general are key elements of livable communities and play critical roles in emergency and evacuation planning.

NARC Supports Federal Passenger Rail Legislation That:

- Funds passenger rail and Amtrak investments 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.

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 that regional planning organizations play in issues related to freight movement. MPOs and other regional planning organizations 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.