



Transportation Reauthorization Priorities

To support regional planning and local prioritization in the upcoming transportation reauthorization, Congress should:

1. **Provide adequate, stable, and flexible funding** so regions can choose the investments that work best for them across all modes.
2. **Enhance the role of MPOs and RTPOs** to achieve increased mobility, access to opportunities, and economic prosperity, while addressing rapid shifts in demographics, technology, and climate.
3. **Prioritize transportation safety** to eliminate deaths and serious injuries.
4. **Empower regions to meet the challenges and opportunities created by technology and data**, which are rapidly emerging issues in transportation and planning.

America needs a new transportation authorization bill by 2020. Transportation infrastructure is the nation's economic backbone – essential to job creation, competitiveness, and high quality of life. Maintaining and expanding the nation's system of highways and roads, bridges, transit systems, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities is essential for the well-being of all Americans.

Reauthorization needs to provide strong support for regional planning. Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Rural or Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) are where cities and counties literally come together in collaboration with state DOTs, transit agencies, businesses, and other public and private stakeholders to set local priorities for transportation investments.

Regional collaboration ensures that transportation investments spur economic growth, meet the needs of both employers and workers, and meet other local and national priorities. Transportation investments are a means to achieve increased economic activity and greater regional prosperity. MPOs and RTPOs analyze demographic changes, future residential development, and expected job placement; they perform technical analysis, conduct public engagement, and convene regional leaders to ensure the best possible return on infrastructure investments.

Regional planning organizations ensure the successful local implementation of the federal transportation program.

Regions rely on federal transportation funding. State and local governments together provide more than two-thirds of the funding spent annually on transportation projects. Federal funding is essential to leveraging local spending and should be increased to reflect the national importance of these investments.

For decades, per-gallon taxes on gasoline and diesel (fuel taxes) fully funded the federal transportation program. More recently, as vehicles have begun using less fuel per mile or stopped using gas altogether, fuel tax collections have flattened. Additionally, as federal gas taxes have not been raised in a quarter-century, inflation has further reduced their purchasing power.

These factors have created a widening gap between gas tax revenues and the funding needed to maintain and improve our transportation system. Congress has transferred \$144 billion in general funds to the highway trust fund (HTF) over the previous decade to close this gap. The cycle of general fund transfers will continue without increased dedicated funding. Funding uncertainty makes planning for and investing in long-term infrastructure difficult.

Increasing the fuel tax is necessary in the near-term. A fuel tax increase will serve as a bridge until implementation studies are completed for future-focused funding streams like the mileage-based user fee currently under consideration by several states.

1. Provide adequate, stable, and flexible funding



Dedicate additional revenue to fix the Highway Trust Fund. Congress must close the existing funding gap and grow the program over the coming decade. Increasing and indexing existing federal fuel taxes can achieve near-term solvency. This will provide a window to identify, study, and implement a long-term solution such as a mile-based user fee.

- **Support multimodal investments.** Transit, rail, bike and pedestrian, safety, and other similar projects should remain federal priorities. Flexible funding allows communities to prioritize federal funding that reflects local needs.
- **Increase funding for transportation planning.** MPOs and RTPOs are responsible for an increasingly complex array of activities and analyses. Effective planning crafts solutions that address a wide variety of transportation needs. Additional funding is needed to support these activities.



Increase the portion of the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP) provided to local areas through their MPO. STBGP is the most direct way to fund local transportation priorities and leverage local dollars. More funding for local priorities enhances the authority of local decision makers.

- **Expand decision-making authority for STBGP and Transportation Alternatives funds to MPOs of all sizes.** Provide MPOs of all sizes with the option to direct funding to projects within their planning area.
- **Increase authority and funding for non-metropolitan planning organizations to incentivize rural planning and urban-rural collaboration.** Encouraging more states to create and support RTPOs would help rural communities compete economically.
- **Create a separate, dedicated freight fund and make MPOs eligible recipients.** Freight movement is a national priority with local and regional impacts. Make MPOs eligible for funding to facilitate freight planning. Give a say to impacted non-metropolitan and rural areas in how funding is distributed and how projects are implemented.
- **Continue the formula-based distribution of a significant portion of federal transportation dollars.** Formula distribution is more equitable, provides funding to communities of all sizes, and ensures predictability and stability in funding, which is essential for infrastructure investment decision-making.
- **Continue to use performance-based criteria for discretionary grant program decisions.** Maintain local and regional benefits, such as economic development, as the basis for project funding decisions. Prohibit funding decisions based on the share of funding a local sponsor can provide, which is particularly important in rural areas where local match is harder to provide, especially for larger transportation projects.
- **Remove the federal tolling prohibition.** Tolling can raise funds to rebuild aging Interstates and allow for greater use of managed lanes as a congestion management strategy. In consultation with impacted metropolitan and rural areas, give states authority to decide whether tolling is appropriate, how it is implemented, and how resulting funds are spent. Ensure tolling in one state does not have undue impact on goods and people movement in surrounding states.



Highlighted priorities



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2. Enhance the Role of MPOs and RTPOs

- **Increase opportunities for transportation planning organizations in rural areas to shape their regions and incentivize rural planning and urban-rural collaboration.** Increase funding for non-metropolitan planning organizations and increasing their authority to direct how project funds are distributed. Encourage and incentivize more states to create and support RTPOs to help rural communities compete economically.
- **Maintain the regional planning process but improve it to better respond to current and emerging opportunities and challenges.** Regional planning and the MPO process are essential elements of the federal transportation program. Update planning law to reflect emerging issues such as technology and resilience and provide MPOs and RTPOs with additional authority, data, and funding to meet these challenges within their communities. In the STBGP, add non-traditional and emerging technologies to the list of projects eligible for funding so they are part of the regional prioritization process.
- **Shorten the time and resources needed to review projects.** Streamlining reduces red tape, saves resources, and moves projects along more quickly, while protecting natural and historic resources.
- **Ensure state rules and requirements do not reduce or limit efficient expenditure of federal transportation funding, including planning funding.** Prevent states from adding encumbrances on MPOs for the expenditure of federal funds.
- **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 across agencies. Continue to provide federal data sources to support regional and local planning.

3. Prioritize transportation safety

- **Expand opportunities for ensuring the safety of all system users.** Preventing deaths of and serious injuries to pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicle drivers and passengers, young and old, urban, suburban, and rural is paramount and requires funding and authority across all levels of government to achieve.
- **Provide MPOs and RTPOs Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funding.** To ensure all areas of a state benefit from this important funding and to help MPOs and RTPOs meet federal safety performance measure requirements, suballocate HSIP to MPOs and RTPOs for local prioritization. Expand the eligible projects to ensure non-driving modes are better protected, including planning and projects for Vision Zero.
- **Increase funding for Transportation Alternatives (including Safe Routes to Schools) and expand eligible projects.** TAP provides funding for projects to make biking and walking viable and safe mobility options. SRTS encourages walking and biking to the nation's schools and enhances the safety of the most vulnerable users. Restrict the ability of states to transfer funds from the Transportation Alternatives program for other uses.

4. Empower regions to meet the challenges and utilize the opportunities created by technology and data

- **Provide funding for research, case studies, and implementation of new technologies to incentivize regional and local solutions.** Recognize and amplify the important role of MPOs and RTPOs in the study and implementation of emerging technologies.
- **Ensure regional access to data.** Public access to automated vehicle safety data will improve planning and maximize public benefit. Regional organizations can help communities manage the quantities and types of data resulting from emerging technologies, including data storage, analysis, and security, and facilitating regional data sharing agreements, while protecting the proprietary and personal nature of the data. Additionally, federal assistance with data on access to jobs and educational opportunities can help ensure more equitable and efficient project prioritization.
- **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.
- **Ensure technology interoperability, particularly across state lines and other jurisdictional boundaries and on roads of all sizes.** Federal standards will help ensure this can be achieved.
- **Avoid heavy-handed restrictions on or regulation of private companies.** Ensure federal action does not stifle private innovation while prioritizing the public safety and data protection.

The Value of Regional Planning

Where we live, work, socialize, recreate, and shop is not confined to a single city or town. Our well-being depends on a web of services and opportunities that exist across a broader region. The economic health and sustainability of regions is an important factor in our ability to realize a good quality of life.

To create vibrant regions, regional planning considers the interplay between transportation and mobility, strong economic performance, and access to opportunities, at a scale that also accounts for the dynamics between urban, suburban, and rural areas. Regional planning organizations bring together elected officials and others to prioritize an approach to these issues that maximizes benefits and minimizes costs.

This multi-jurisdictional approach helps achieve thriving regional economies and a stronger American economy, efficient investment strategies, and increased innovation. Meanwhile, rapid shifts in technology, data, demographics, climate, and transportation – all of which occur across jurisdictional boundaries – put regional planning organizations and their work at the center of these changes.

The Importance of Regional Transportation Planning

A unique, decades-long partnership among federal, state, tribal, and local governments and regional planning organizations – each with unique roles in carrying out the transportation program – ensures federal funds are spent in a manner reflecting local prioritization and decision-making while working to achieve federal goals.

Thousands of municipal and county governments exist across the nation, each with unique infrastructure needs eligible for federal funding. Limited federal dollars cannot support all these projects at once. To prioritize the distribution of limited funds most efficiently, MPOs and RTPOs coordinate their region's priorities and funding across transportation, housing, economic development and more, and based on this understanding they convene local officials and empower them to consider the broad range of economic, social, environmental, and other factors important to their communities when collectively deciding how federal transportation dollars are spent. MPOs and RTPOs ensure projects are carefully considered and appropriately prioritized within an entire region.

About NARC

The National Association of Regional Councils is the national voice for regions and regional solutions. NARC's member organizations include regional councils, councils of governments, regional planning and development agencies, MPOs, RTPOs, and other regional organizations. These organizations bring local elected and appointed officials together to work collaboratively to address their residents' needs and promote a regional approach to planning for the future. For over 50 years, NARC has represented the interests of its members and advanced regional cooperation on transportation, economic and community development, energy and environment, public safety, and a variety of other local issues undertaken by its member organizations.



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Erich Zimmermann, NARC Deputy Director, erich@narc.org, 202.618.5697