

The National Beat
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Feature Focus

APTA Survey Preliminary Results and USDOT RFI Extension

AMPO Programming Note: As we head into final preparations for the AMPO Annual Conference, The National Beat and Friday Docket will be taking a short break. Regular issues will resume following the conference, but we'll continue to send out major policy updates in the meantime to ensure you have timely information on federal developments.

APTA Proposal on MPO Boards: AMPO Survey - Preliminary Findings

What's APTA Proposing

Its *Surface Transportation Authorization Recommendations* ([p. 12](#)), suggest two major federal changes affecting MPOs:

- **Board seats:** Require voting seats for transit providers that together account for at least 75% of annual unlinked passenger trips in the Urbanized Area.
- **Appeals process:** Create a formal process where FTA and FHWA jointly investigate procedural complaints about MPO actions within a set timeframe, with decisions eligible for judicial review.

Why AMPO surveyed members: To understand what these ideas could mean for governance, board structure, planning authority, and interagency collaboration, AMPO ran a quick-turn member survey.

Who responded: 52 MPOs responded to the survey ((50% Large (1M+), 27% Medium (200k–1M), 23% Small (50k–199k)) with a geographically diverse mix. Results provide an indicative snapshot but are not statistically significant relative to the ~410 MPOs nationwide.

Topline results (preliminary)

- **MPOs broadly value transit representation in their processes** and view working with transit agencies as an integral part of their strategy for regional planning and decision-making.
- **Transit at the table: 86%** report that a transit agency has a seat on the MPO policy board.
 - Representation roles vary: in some cases, seats are held by transit CEOs/General Managers; in others, elected officials serving on both MPO and transit boards provide dual representation.
 - Beyond board seats, **98% engage transit agencies via advisory committees, non-voting seats on the board, or working groups.**
- **When a seat isn't present:** Respondents emphasized this typically reflects temporary or structural issues—not a lack of engagement—such as election turnover or staffing changes; state law/enabling statutes that fix board composition; or rotating seats across multiple providers.

Where concerns arise

- **Federal board mandates.** While MPOs support transit involvement, many raised questions about whether federally mandated seat requirements would **align with local governance**

structures and state laws. Additionally, some raised concerns surrounding risk of **politicizing MPO boards.** Respondents expressed a preference for flexibility to reflect the diverse ways MPOs and transit agencies collaborate across regions.

- **75% ridership threshold.** Often viewed as misaligned with MPO planning geographies, multi-UZA areas, and regions with multiple operators, risking over- or under-representation.
 - A rigid **75% threshold does not reflect multimodal, multi-operator, multi-UZA realities.**
- **Federal appeals process.** Respondents expressed concern that a formal federal appeals process **could add time, cost, and conflict to the planning process.** Additionally, some flagged that an appeals process **could slow project delivery.**
 - Many emphasized a desire to strengthen existing mechanisms for collaboration and conflict resolution rather than add a new layer of federal review.

If you have any questions on the preliminary survey results, please reach out to Katie Economou, Legislative Director, at keconomou@ampo.org.

Reminder: USDOT's Reauthorization RFI: Comment Period Extended

USDOT has **extended the comment period** for its request for information (RFI), "Advancing a Surface Transportation Proposal that Focuses on America's Fundamental Infrastructure Needs," **until September 8th.**

AMPO Resources: To support MPOs in weighing in, **AMPO created a customizable response template that reflects our national policy platform** and the priorities of the Local Officials for Transportation (LOT) Coalition. AMPO encourages all MPOs to share their priorities.

AMPO submitted a response to the RFI, highlighting national MPO priorities and reinforcing the positions of the LOT Coalition. In addition, **the LOT Coalition submitted a separate joint letter.**

Who's weighing in and what are we seeing so far?

As of today, there are about 2,500 submissions on the docket. We are tracking submissions from other relevant national organizations and advocacy groups to understand how stakeholders are approaching reauthorization (**[read last week's write-up on MPO-relevant submissions and common themes in responses](#)**).

Since last week, we've identified **211 comments** referencing empowering MPOs and local governments. (**[read last week's write-up on MPO-relevant submissions and common themes in responses](#)**).

AMPO will continue to track submissions through the comment period and provide updates, including a future in-depth review of submissions and a mapping of perspectives surrounding reauthorization. As always if you have any questions on submitting an RFI response, please reach out to Katie Economou, Legislative Director, at keconomou@ampo.org.



Federal Roundup

Congress: *Reauthorization Reminders and Updates*

Administration & Agencies: *White House, EPA, DOS, FEMA, and USDOT Updates*

NOFOs: *ICAM, RATAPP, ARPA-I Ideas Challenge, PIDP*



Congress

Congressional “Vibe” Check

No major legislative updates this week, as both chambers will be out for August recess and return September 2nd.

- **Reauthorization:** Throughout the summer, authorizing committees have been in the process of drafting base legislative text. The introduction of reauthorization bills and Committee markups are anticipated in early fall.
 -  **REGISTER!** Join the Local Officials in Transportation (LOT) Coalition for **updates on surface transportation reauthorization, our policy priorities, and how you can get involved**. LOT unites AMPO, NACo, NADO, NARC, NLC, and USCM to strengthen regional and local access to federal transportation funding to support communities of all sizes—from major metros to small towns—, in planning and delivering the infrastructure their residents depend on.
 -  **Chairman Rouzer Hosts Roundtable on Reauthorization:** Rep. David Rouzer (R-NC), Chairman of the Highways and Transit Subcommittee, convened local business leaders, transportation officials, and federal partners in Wilmington to spotlight the need for surface transportation reauthorization. Participants, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce, and small business representatives, emphasized how **federal investment in roads, bridges, and rail underpins economic growth, supply chains, and community connectivity**.
 - The press release leaned heavily on themes of commerce and supply chains, signaling continued opportunities for business groups to engage in shaping the reauthorization debate. It also highlighted the importance of local-to-national alignment, with local perspectives tied directly to federal policy outcomes. Similar events hosted by both Democrats and Republicans during August recess have echoed this messaging, pointing to supply chains and business engagement as central pillars of the upcoming bill. **For MPOs, strengthening partnerships with local chambers of commerce and the business community may be a valuable strategy heading into reauthorization**, ensuring MPOs are spotlighted as drivers of regional economic competitiveness.
 - **REMINDER...Senate Commerce Committee:** The committee is now soliciting priorities from members for reauthorization. Their process mirrors what we saw with Senate EPW earlier this year: only senators can submit directly, and there is no general stakeholder portal. Just as with EPW, **this is a good moment for**

stakeholders, including MPOs, to connect with their Senators' offices and share legislative priorities for them to consider in their submissions to Commerce.

What's making headlines?

-  **Impacts of Congress' NAE Fund Recissions:** Earlier this year, Congress voted to eliminate the Neighborhood Access and Equity (NAE) grant program, pulling back \$3.2 billion in unobligated funds. The move **rescinded awards for 55 projects**, including in 19 in Republican districts. Some republican leaders hailed the repeal as cutting “wasteful Green New Deal spending,” but local officials say it **leaves significant gaps in needed infrastructure funding, forcing project downsizing or uncertainty**. Critics argue the rollback hurts communities across the US on safety, mobility, and economic growth targets.



Administration & Agencies

-  **EPA Blocks California from Regulating Out-of-State Trucks:** EPA proposed allowing California to enforce its “Clean Truck Check” emissions inspection program on trucks registered in the state but rejected the state’s bid to apply it to vehicles from other states or abroad, citing constitutional limits on interstate commerce and federal authority over foreign relations. EPA Administrator Zeldin accused California of overreach, while the agency noted that out-of-state trucks account for roughly 30 percent of nitrogen oxide emissions in California. The proposal marks the first time EPA has moved to deny a state plan for attempting to regulate beyond its borders, with **public comment open through September 25th**.
-  **State Department Freezes Truck Driver Visas:** Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced a halt to all employment visas for commercial truck drivers, citing safety risks and competition with US truckers. The move follows USDOT’s investigation into a Florida crash involving a driver who failed an English proficiency test and was found to have improperly obtained licenses in Washington and California. USDOT Secretary Duffy has tied the incident to broader state-level enforcement failures, arguing it underscores the need for stricter federal oversight (read more below). The visa freeze marks a sharp escalation in the administration’s crackdown on foreign truck drivers.
-  **Former FEMA Chief Accuses Agency of Delaying Aid:** Cameron Hamilton, who briefly led FEMA earlier this year before being fired, publicly accused the agency of creating “new forms of bureaucracy” that are slowing disaster response and potentially misleading the public. His remarks came a day after 181 current and former FEMA staff issued a letter criticizing the administration’s handling of the agency, with dozens reportedly placed on leave afterward. The Department of Homeland Security defended FEMA’s record, saying billions have been disbursed swiftly.



USDOT

-  **USDOT Threatens Funding Cuts Over English Proficiency Enforcement:** Secretary Duffy warned California, Washington, and New Mexico that they **risk losing all federal**

Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program (MCSAP) funds unless they enforce federal English Language Proficiency rules for truck drivers. In FY 24, California received \$32 million, New Mexico received \$7 million, and Washington state received \$10 million. FMCSA chief counsel Jesse Ellison emphasized that DOT hopes states will voluntarily comply, saying, “We do not want to penalize the states.” Duffy, however, warned the department has “wonderful tools that will make it very challenging for states to do business if they don’t comply,” leaving the door open to further action even though he also downplayed the likelihood of additional phases. **The states have 30 days to respond.** The announcement follows broader DOT efforts to audit state CDL processes and tighten oversight of non-domiciled commercial drivers.

-  **FHWA Posts Ferry Boat Program – FY 2025 Distribution:** FHWA announced \$174.5 million in FY 2025 Ferry Boat Program (FBP) funding, supporting construction and maintenance of publicly owned ferry boats, terminals, and facilities. Allocations are based on passenger counts, vehicles carried, and route miles from the 2022 National Census of Ferry Operators, with each eligible state receiving at least \$100,000. Top recipients include Washington (\$39.8M), Alaska (\$38.5M), New York (\$16.6M), Texas (\$14.3M), and Louisiana (\$8.5M). Funds are administered through state DOTs, with an 80% federal share (100% for territories), and **must be obligated within three years or redistributed.**
-  **USDOT Launches New Acela Trains, Moves to Reclaim Union Station:** Secretary Duffy joined Amtrak leaders to unveil the new NextGen Acela trainsets and announced that USDOT will reclaim management of Washington Union Station. The new Acela trains promise faster and more reliable service. At the same event, Duffy said USDOT would reassert control over Union Station, arguing the hub has fallen into disrepair and needs stronger federal direction. Union Station, owned by FRA, has cycled through private leases and Amtrak control in recent years, with a \$7 billion redevelopment proposal never fully financed. Formal transfer of control is expected next month, aligning with broader administration moves to increase federal oversight of DC facilities and policing.
-  **FRA Cancels Additional California High-Speed Rail Projects:** FRA announced the withdrawal of \$175 million in federal funding for four California projects tied to the state’s high-speed rail effort. The cancellation adds to more than \$5 billion in federal support withdrawn across the Trump administration’s two terms Secretary Duffy criticized California’s progress and cited the \$135 billion estimated total cost. He also ordered a review of all remaining federal grants (including obligated funds) linked to the project, following FRA’s earlier termination of \$4 billion in funding in July after a 315-page report raised concerns about schedule and feasibility. California is challenging the cancellations in court.
-  **USDOT Unveils Penn Station Overhaul Schedule and \$43M Grant:** Secretary Duffy announced that construction on transformation of New York’s Penn Station will begin by the end of 2027, with Amtrak receiving a new \$43 million federal grant to accelerate early-stage work. The project, taken over from MTA earlier this year, will be led through a public-private partnership model, with Amtrak set to select a master developer by May 2026.

-  **MARAD Celebrates Training Vessel:** MARAD the opening of the State of Maine, the third National Security Multi-Mission Vessel (NSMV), at Hanwha Philly Shipyard. The NSMV program, a centerpiece of the administration's maritime dominance initiative, supports 1,500 shipyard jobs and replaces aging reserve fleet vessels with modern ships equipped for both education and emergency response.

Notice of Funding Opportunities

Open USDOT NOFOs

-  **Rural and Tribal Assistance Pilot Program:** The Build America Bureau has **reopened** applications for the Rural and Tribal Assistance Pilot Program, offering \$54.2 million in no-match, first-come, first-served grants to help rural and Tribal communities access expert advisors for infrastructure project development. The amended NOFO covers FY24 and FY25 funds, with \$20 million set aside for Tribes.
 - **Deadline:** A new application must be submitted between **September 8 and October 8, 2025**, due to earlier technical issues.
 - **Webinar:** August 26 to guide prospective applicants ([register here](#)).
-  **Innovative Finance and Asset Concession Grants (IFACG):** offering up to \$45.98 million to help public entities assess existing assets for value and explore innovative financing, alternative delivery, and public-private partnership options.
 - **Deadline:** October 1, 2025
 - **Webinar:** August 27 to guide prospective applicants ([register here](#)).
-  **ARPA-I Ideas and Innovation Challenge:** Prizes of up to \$320,000 across two stages available. Ideas Challenge is ARPA-I's open call to innovators across the public and private sectors to help identify Research and Development (R&D) proposals that have the potential to deliver technologies that radically:
 - Enhance the safe, secure, and efficient movement of people and goods,
 - Lower the long-term costs of infrastructure planning, construction, and maintenance,
 - Strengthen the resilience of infrastructure against physical, natural, and cyber threats, and
 - Enhance the United States' position as a global leader in advanced transportation infrastructure technologies and materials.
 - **Deadline:** September 17, 2025
-  **Port Infrastructure Development Program (PIDP):** amended version of the PIDP NOFO for projects that improve the safety, efficiency, or reliability of the movement of goods into, out of, around, or within a port.
 - **Deadline:** September 10, 2025

Upcoming NOFOs

-  [Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation \(SMART\) Grants – R2:](#) Stage 2 grants are up to \$15,000,000 and 36 months. Only recipients of Stage 1 grants, or eligible entities designated by prior Stage 1 recipients, are eligible to apply for Stage 2.
 - **Expected Release:** “fall 2025” according to July 25th website update, however, past OST webinars had indicated that it could be released at “end of August.”
-  [Bridge Investment Program \(BIP\):](#) BIP focuses on existing bridges to reduce the overall number of bridges in poor condition, or in fair condition at risk of falling into poor condition. There are three categories for applications:
 - **Expected Release for Planning and Bridge Project Grants:** TBD, likely soon given the quickly approaching October 1 and November 1 deadlines.
 - **Planning Grants Deadline:** October 1, 2025
 - **Bridge Project Grants Deadline:** November 1, 2025
 -  Read AMPO’s BIP analysis [here](#)

 Access **AMPO’s NOFO Tracker** [here](#).



National News

-  [PA Considers Using Transit Capital Fund in State Budget Deal:](#) PA Governor Josh Shapiro said he is willing to consider tapping the state’s Public Transportation Trust Fund, which is normally reserved for capital projects, to stabilize transit operations like SEPTA service, but only as part of a broader, long-term funding package.

Recent Editions

[August 22nd \(2025\)](#)

- **Federal Focus (8/22):** USDOT's SAFE ROADS Initiative FAQ & USDOT's Reauthorization RFI Comment Period Extension

[August 14th \(2025\)](#)

- **Federal Focus (8/14):** NEVI Guidance & Executive Order on Oversight of Grantmaking

[August 4th \(2025\)](#)

- **Federal Focus (8/4):** USDOT Reauthorization RFI, AMPO Letter to EPW, Senate THUD Bill, EO 14321

[July 25th \(2025\)](#)

- **Federal Focus (7/25):** USDOT Reauthorization Kick-off & RFI, FY26 THUD Appropriations Bill, EPW Hearings on Reauthorization, T&I Hearing on USDOT's Budget

[July 10th \(2025\)](#)

- **Federal Focus (7/10):** One Big Beautiful Bill Act (Analysis), USDOT Letter to all Funding Recipients, FHWA Highway Program Apportionments

[July 3rd \(2025\)](#)

- **Federal Focus (7/3):** NEPA Reform (Analysis), Division Office Cuts, EPA Grant Alarm Bells, USDOT Safe Roads Campaign, FTA Deregulatory Measures, Reconciliation Updates, Reauthorization Updates

[June 18th \(2025\)](#)

[June 11th \(2025\)](#)

- **AMPO Analysis (6/11):** Potential Freeze on \$30B in Agency Funds, Bridge Investment Program FY 2025 NOFO (analysis), USDOT Approval of 529 grants, Administration Resets CAFE Program, Updates to BEAD Program

[June 6th \(2025\)](#)

- **AMPO Analysis (6/6):** FY 26 USDOT Budget Request, DOE Grant Cancellations, FTA Master Agreements Update, GAO Ruling on EV Funds, Supreme Court Narrows NEPA Scope, FHWA Terminates Transportation Planning Rulemaking

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