

The National Beat

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Federal Roundup

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Congress

Congressional “Vibe” Check

Government Shutdown. On September 30, the White House directed federal agencies to implement their shutdown plans after Congress failed to pass a short-term funding measure. Forty-two days later, marking the longest government shutdown in US history, Congress appears close to ending the impasse. On Monday night, the [Senate passed a continuing resolution \(CR\) 60–40](#), sending it to the House for a final vote expected tonight at 5:10 PM.

The continuing resolution would **extend funding for most federal agencies through January 30**, while providing full-year appropriations for select departments. It also guarantees back pay for federal workers, reinstates laid-off employees, and temporarily freezes federal workforce reductions. President Trump is expected to sign the measure once it clears the House. Supporters have called the deal a pragmatic step to restore stability, while critics argue it postpones key policy debates and sets up another funding showdown early next year. *Read AMPO’s analysis of the shutdown effects on USDOT [here](#).*

- [Shutdown Deal Temporarily Halts Federal Layoffs](#): The continuing resolution halts planned federal workforce reductions by prohibiting any agency from initiating, carrying out, or implementing a RIF until January 30. The language effectively pauses administration plans to cut positions across federal agencies. While this offers a short-term reprieve for affected employees, many expect the administration to revisit those cuts once the freeze expires, citing long-term downsizing efforts unrelated to the shutdown itself. Nine federal agencies have reported that roughly 3,900 employees received preliminary RIF notices during the shutdown. Under the CR, any affected workers must be reinstated. Analysts caution, however, that attrition, early retirements, and prior buyouts have already thinned federal staffing levels, raising concerns about long-term agency capacity even after the government reopens.

Reauthorization. Authorizing committees continue to advance work on the next surface transportation bill. The Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee is expected to drop its bill by the end of the year, with the House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee likely following in the spring of 2026. In the House, base text is already being shared between majority and minority staff for several components, likely including the NHTSA and FMCSA titles, with the highway title expected to come last. Meanwhile, USDOT’s operating administrations (including FHWA and FTA) are finalizing their reauthorization proposals for review by the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) before formal submission to Congress.

This period remains a key window for MPOs and local partners to educate their congressional delegations on key priorities and reinforce the importance of regional and local control in shaping the next authorization. Here are a few ways to keep your congressional delegation and local partners informed:

- **Share the LOT Coalition Letter:** Send the [LOT Coalition's letter to EPW and T&I leadership](#), along with your region's reauthorization priorities, to your congressional delegation (district and DC office staff).
- **Meet with Your Congressional Delegation:** Schedule meetings with your Representatives and Senators (and their staff) to educate them on your region's priorities and how federal surface transportation programs impact your local communities.
 - *Tip:* Invite your region's local elected officials and MPO board members to demonstrate a unified regional voice.
- **Engage District Offices:** Invite district staff (and your Representative, if in-district) to upcoming board meetings, local listening sessions, or regional events focused on transportation priorities.
- **Tailor Your Materials:** Develop short, region-specific one-pagers summarizing your key legislative priorities.
- **Brief Your Boards and Partners:** Keep your local policy boards, city and county partners, and regional stakeholders informed on timing, key priorities, and how reauthorization may impact regional/local projects and programs.
- **Use AMPO Tools:** Access the [MPO Engagement Toolkit](#) to find templates, messaging guides, peer examples, and sample materials for education and outreach.
- **Reach Out for Support:** contact Katie Economou, Legislative Director, at keconomou@ampo.org for additional guidance or help tailoring your materials.

As reauthorization discussions progress, research groups, think tanks, trade associations, and national organizations continue to shape the narrative around how federal transportation programs should be adapted in the next transportation bill.

-  **Urban Institute: Reauthorization Strategies:** A new Urban Institute analysis argues that the next surface transportation reauthorization offers Congress an opportunity to strengthen program performance and equity. While the IIJA expanded funding, the report finds that spending often failed to improve project delivery, environmental outcomes, or equitable access. The authors propose three reforms:
 - Improve grant effectiveness by focusing on access over vehicle throughput and building local technical capacity.
 - Advance sustainability by prioritizing maintenance, integrating housing and land-use planning, and allowing transit operations funding.
 - Direct resources where they're needed most by simplifying applications, creating regional block grants, and reinvesting in neighborhood reconnection.
 They conclude that the next authorization should shift from short-term construction metrics toward long-term goals of accessibility, sustainability, and equity.

What's Making Headlines?

-  **Senate Commerce Committee Hearing on Transportation Nominees:** The Senate Commerce Committee held back-to-back hearings this week to consider several key transportation nominees, but policy discussions were largely overshadowed by partisan clashes. Together, the hearings underscored the increasingly political environment surrounding federal transportation leadership and the challenges of maintaining continuity in agency governance during the shutdown.
 - **On November 5**, senators met to review nominations for Ryan McCormack (Under Secretary for Transportation Policy), Daniel Edwards (Assistant Secretary for Aviation and International Affairs), and Trent Morse (Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority Board). The session quickly derailed after an exchange between Sen. Bernie Moreno (R-OH) and Sen. Jackie Rosen (D-NV) over vehicle safety data and privacy concerns, shifting focus away from the nominees' qualifications and signaling continued tension around transportation oversight and accountability.
 - **The following day**, the committee reconvened to consider John Deleeuw (NTSB) and Richard Kloster and Michelle Schultz (STB). That hearing also became contentious amid broader disputes about agency independence and the ongoing government shutdown. Lawmakers raised concerns about the recent removals of NTSB Vice Chair Alvin Brown and STB Member Robert Primus, both of whom have filed lawsuits challenging their dismissals.



Administration & Agencies

USDOT

-  **USDOT Workforce Cuts Since January:** New internal data show USDOT has lost over 3,500 full-time employees since January (i.e., a 6.1 percent overall reduction) but the steepest cuts occurred outside the Federal Aviation Administration. While FAA staffing fell just 2.6 percent, other USDOT agencies collectively shed more than one-fifth of their workforce, a 20.9 percent decline driven by the Deferred Resignation Program (“**fork in the road**”) and limited rehiring. FTA saw the largest drop at 35.7 percent, followed by NHTSA (-28.5%), FHWA (-27.5%), and OST (-24.6%). By contrast, FAA mitigated losses by hiring over 2,500 new air traffic controllers. The reductions underscore a widening imbalance between aviation and surface transportation capacity, raising questions about agency performance and oversight as the administration continues reshaping the federal workforce.
-  **USDOT to Roll Back CAFE Standards:** Deputy Transportation Secretary Steven Bradbury announced Thursday that NHTSA will soon unveil a sweeping rollback of past fuel economy standards, describing it as a “complete reset” of the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) program. Bradbury noted that the Biden administration had “abused and misused” the program to accelerate EV adoption beyond congressional intent, and claimed the new proposal could yield roughly \$100 billion in economic savings. The regulation, currently under White House review, would weaken standards through model year 2031 and follows recent congressional action eliminating civil penalties for automakers that fail

to meet CAFE targets. The forthcoming rule marks a major departure from previous climate and efficiency policies, coming alongside EPA's separate move to [revoke its greenhouse gas endangerment finding](#) and cease regulating tailpipe emissions.

- [🔗 Court Halts USDOT Rule Restricting CDL Access](#): A federal appeals court has temporarily blocked FMCSA's [Interim Final Rule](#) limiting noncitizens' access to commercial driver's licenses (CDLs), allowing state licensing agencies to continue current practices. The regulation sought to restrict CDLs and learner's permits to "foreign individuals in lawful status," require unexpired foreign passports and arrival records, and mandate additional immigration status checks. Secretary Duffy announced the rule in September after a fatal crash involving an undocumented driver and threatened to withhold \$160 million in highway funds from California, which he accused of issuing improper CDLs.
- [🔗 FTA Finalizes CIG Policy Guidance](#): FTA issued final policy guidance for the Capital Investment Grants (CIG) program. The biggest change is how "environmental benefits" are rated: FTA drops VMT-based calculations and the social cost of carbon and instead ties ratings to EPA air-quality designations. Projects located wholly or partially in nonattainment or maintenance areas receive a high rating; those entirely in attainment areas receive medium. FTA clarifies that projects crossing multiple areas still qualify for the higher rating if any segment is in a nonattainment or maintenance area. The notice also removes "urgent care" from the land-use "access to essential services" measure due to the discontinuation of the HIFLD dataset, with FTA exploring NAICS-based substitutes in future updates. Companion templates and reporting instructions will be updated later; until then, January 2025 materials remain in use. This guidance is effective immediately.

💰 Notice of Funding Opportunities

Note: Due to the government shutdown (read AMPO's summary [here](#)), expect delays in issuing new NOFOs, making selections, or signing/amending grant agreements until a CR/full-year law restores funding authority.

Open USDOT NOFOs

- [🔗 Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Grant Program – National](#): This FRA program provides funding for capital projects that reduce the state of good repair backlog, improve performance, or expand or establish new intercity passenger rail service, including privately operated intercity passenger rail service.
 - **Deadline:** January 7, 2026

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:** Originally expected to in late fall (likely impacted due to ongoing government shutdown).

-  [Tribal Transportation Program Safety Fund](#): This FHWA program addresses transportation fatalities and severe injuries in Indian country. Multijurisdictional groups are eligible to apply.
 - **Expected Release**: Originally forecast for October 1, 2025 (likely impacted due to ongoing government shutdown)
 - **Estimated Application Due Date**: January 15, 2026

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



National News

-  [Eno: Results of Transportation Ballot Measures](#): Across the US, transportation measures on the 2025 ballot saw broad approval, with 78 percent of the 82 tracked initiatives passing, reflecting strong voter support for local infrastructure investment. Most measures focused on road improvements, which comprised two-thirds of all proposals, though public transit and general infrastructure initiatives also fared well. Municipal measures had the highest success rate at 82 percent, underscoring local governments' central role in advancing transportation projects. Notable outcomes included Mecklenburg County, North Carolina's approval of a one percent sales tax dedicating 60 percent of its proceeds to transit expansion, and Columbus, Ohio's passage of a \$400 million bond for streets and sidewalks as part of a record \$1.9 billion infrastructure package. Meanwhile, Pitman Borough, New Jersey voters rejected the Glassboro-Camden light rail proposal, and New York City approved consolidating its planning maps into a single digital platform. The results collectively point to sustained public willingness to fund local mobility.

Recent Editions

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

- **Federal Focus (11/6)**: LOT Coalition Sends Letter to House T&I and Senate EPW Committee Leadership

[October 31st \(2025\)](#)

- **Federal Focus (10/31)**: Memo on Streamlining the Review of Deregulatory Action & USDOT's DBE IFR FAQ

 View all past editions of the [National Beat](#) Policy Newsletter [here](#)