

# The National Beat

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## Federal Roundup

**Congress:** Reauthorization & Legislative Action

**Administration & Agencies:** USDOT Updates

**NOFOs:** Fed-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail



## Congress

### Congressional “Vibe” Check

**Reauthorization.** Reauthorization discussions are picking up speed, and major decisions are taking shape before committees finalize their base text. On the House side, majority and minority T&I staff continue to exchange draft sections. NHTSA and FMCSA titles have circulated; the highway title is expected next. Once base text is out (likely early spring) any major proposals not already included face steeper odds through amendment.

AMPO and the Local Officials for Transportation (LOT) Coalition recently [sent a letter to T&I and EPW leadership](#), urging Congress to embed strong regional and local access to funds, including meaningful suballocation through MPOs, in the reauthorization bill.

On the Administration side, USDOT’s operating administrations (including FHWA and FTA) are transmitting their own reauthorization proposals to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the final step before proposals are formally sent to Congress.

This period remains an important window for MPOs to educate their delegations about key priorities and reinforce how regional/local leadership can strengthen the next authorization.

### House timing and dynamics

- **Now:** Staff-to-staff exchanges of base text are underway (House T&I); other key House committees (e.g., Ways and Means, Appropriations) are beginning to identify their reauthorization priorities.
  - **Note:** *Majority T&I staff have reportedly asked members to hold off on introducing marker bills or sign-on letters until after base text drops. This limits formal action by members on the committee in the short term, but it makes early, coordinated education by MPOs and local partners even more important so priorities are considered as base text is drafted.*
- **Winter 2026:** Bills released and markups expected.
- **Early Spring 2026:** Potential floor time. [Chairman Graves’ \(T&I\) goal](#) is House passage in the spring.
- **IJA expiration — Sept. 30, 2026:** There will be pressure for passage ahead of the IJA’s expiration, though continuing resolutions (CRs) or short-term extensions are possible.
- **Political calendar:** With 2026 midterms approaching (the House is expected to flip to Democratic control) and Chairman Graves in his final term as chair, there is a strong incentive on the majority side to complete work this Congress.

## What We're Hearing from Congress

- **General Themes (Majority T&I & EPW):**
  - Interest in consolidating or sunseting certain discretionary programs while shifting more funding toward formulas.
  - Greater flexibility and authority for states.
  - Permitting reform and faster project delivery.
  - Strong interest in innovation, data, and performance-based decision-making.
- **Chairman Graves (T&I) has framed** a “traditional highway bill” with a primary focus on roads, bridges, and highways.
  - He has also signaled that the package will be **narrower than the IIJA**, saying the bill should not spend federal dollars on “murals and train stations or bike paths or walking paths.”
    - This message resonates with members who feel that bills since ISTEA and TEA-21 have been moving too far beyond core highway programs
    - It raises concerns for MPOs and their local partners that rely on federal programs such as TAP, CMAQ, STBG, CRP, and discretionary grants to plan and deliver multimodal, community-scale projects.
  - He has also highlighted **new EV/hybrid fees** as a way to stabilize the Highway Trust Fund (HTF).
- Across both Republicans and Democrats on T&I, **local/regional funding and local/regional decision-making** appear as recurring themes in member priorities.
  - Ranking Member Larsen and T&I Democrats continue to signal local control as a top reauthorization priority.
- Both Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen have emphasized their intention to craft a **bipartisan, member-driven bill**.

## USDOT Signals We're Tracking

Recent [POLITICO reporting](#) suggests the Administration is considering proposals to:

- **Eliminate the Mass Transit Account** of the Highway Trust Fund; and
- **Prohibit states from flexing FHWA formula dollars to FTA** for transit projects.

According to reporting, these proposals have been sent from USDOT to OMB for review as part of internal reauthorization discussions. If advanced, they would have major implications for multimodal networks, transit operations, and rural and small-urban systems that rely on these funds ([read Urban Institute's analysis here](#)).

Importantly, both Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen (House T&I) have [publicly opposed](#) eliminating the Mass Transit Account, underscoring a **bipartisan preference to maintain the longstanding structure of the HTF**. Their early and clear opposition signals that the proposal is unlikely to gain traction in the House, and it would also face significant hurdles in the Senate. Regardless, AMPO is closely monitoring this issue and will provide updates and guidance if any formal proposal emerges.


## Coalition Landscape

- AMPO and the LOT Coalition have pushed back against active discussion circulating on the Hill that local and regional access to funding should be set at ~14%.
  - LOT's red line for the forthcoming bill is **maintaining at least the ~25% precedent from IIJA**, which includes both locally suballocated formula funds and discretionary opportunities directly open to local and regional entities. The [LOT Coalition's letter to EPW and T&I leadership](#) focuses directly on this issue.
- With possible consolidation or elimination of discretionary programs on the table, guaranteed regional/local access through suballocation becomes even more important to sustain meaningful regional/local control.


## What MPOs Can Do

- **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](mailto:keconomou@ampo.org) for additional guidance or help tailoring your materials.



## Research and Thought Leadership Shaping Reauthorization



-  [AASHTO + ARTBA: Rising Construction Costs & Reauthorization Impact](#): A recent Eno Center webinar explored how escalating construction costs are shaping state transportation budgets and could influence the next surface transportation reauthorization. Speakers from AASHTO and ARTBA highlighted that post-IIJA cost pressures (i.e., largely driven by supply chain disruptions, higher material prices, increased borrowing costs, new regulatory requirements, and labor shortages) are straining project delivery nationwide. Both noted that states are seeing fewer bidders and rising prices, with rural areas facing acute labor cost spikes as major projects compete for limited workforces. The discussion also examined how newly expanded "Build America, Buy America" requirements could further increase costs due to stricter domestic sourcing rules. Eno's accompanying [white paper](#) finds that these economic and regulatory factors may constrain the impact of federal

investments and will play a significant role in reauthorization debates, as policymakers weigh how higher construction costs shape funding needs and program design.

-  **Eno: Time to Modernize USDOT:** Eno Transportation released a series of essays arguing that USDOT’s mid-20th-century structure no longer reflects modern mobility, economic development, housing, or digital infrastructure needs. Contributors propose a range of reforms, such as consolidating planning requirements, strengthening national data systems, and improving pathways for pilot projects to scale.
  - **In this series**, Christopher Coes argues that today’s siloed federal programs for housing, transportation, and economic development are too fragmented to address rising costs, aging infrastructure, and widening regional disparities. He proposes replacing this structure with a new Department of Infrastructure, Mobility, and Economic Development that unifies federal planning, permitting, and project delivery. A single “Place Investment Plan” would **merge HUD, EDA, and USDOT planning requirements, while a consolidated project-delivery agency would streamline environmental review and technical assistance**. Coes also calls for a unified national fund combining major formula, discretionary, and credit programs to support projects that improve affordability and access, whether housing, transit, or economic development. He argues that integrating these systems would reduce delays, lower costs, and better align more than \$250 billion in annual federal investment toward building connected, resilient, and opportunity-rich communities.

**What’s Making Headlines?** Outside of reauthorization, a number of transportation issues on the Hill are making news this week:



-  **Senate Commerce Committee Vote on Transportation Nominees:** The Senate Commerce Committee approved two transportation nominees: Trent Morse for the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority board and Michelle Schultz for another term on NTSB. Both now head to the full Senate, with votes possible in December. Two additional nominees, Ryan McCormack for USDOT Undersecretary of policy and John DeLeeuw for the NTSB were withdrawn from the agenda due to incomplete paperwork.
-  **House Democrats Press USDOT to Maintain DBE Protections:** A large bloc of House Democrats is pushing back on potential changes to USDOT’s Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) program (read AMPO’s analysis [here](#)), warning that reforms could undermine more than 50,000 minority- and women-owned small businesses nationwide. In a letter led by Ranking Members Rick Larsen and Nydia Velázquez, 88 lawmakers urged Secretary Duffy to proceed cautiously, citing longstanding disparities in access to capital, credit, and contracting opportunities. They emphasized the role DBE requirements play in ensuring fair competition for federal transportation dollars and called on USDOT to maintain reliable data, provide clear guidance to project sponsors, and collaborate closely with Congress before advancing any significant revisions.

-  [New WOTUS Proposal](#) : Republican lawmakers applauded the administration’s draft rewrite of the “[waters of the US](#)” (WOTUS) definition, arguing it brings needed regulatory clarity and reduces permitting burdens for farmers, landowners, and builders. The proposal aligns with the Supreme Court’s [2023 Sackett ruling](#) by limiting Clean Water Act jurisdiction to wetlands with a continuous surface connection to relatively permanent waters. Majority leaders on the House T&I Committee called the move a common-sense correction to what they viewed as federal overreach under the prior administration. However, Democrats sharply criticized the rule, warning it could remove protections from more than 80 percent of wetlands nationwide and threaten drinking water sources.
-  [Senate Commerce Committee Hearing on Regulations and Rising Vehicle Costs](#) : Leaders from the nation’s largest automakers have been asked to testify at a January 14 Senate Commerce Committee hearing focused on how federal emissions and electric-vehicle rules may be influencing vehicle prices. Chair Ted Cruz said the session will examine the extent to which federal oversight has contributed to higher costs and limited consumer choice, pointing to the sharp rise in average vehicle prices over the past decade. The discussion comes as the administration [pursues multiple rollbacks to fuel economy and environmental standards](#), while automakers continue to cite regulatory requirements, tariffs, and materials costs as factors shaping the market.



## Administration & Agencies

### USDOT

-  [FTA Proposes Ending Weekly Transit Data Reporting Requirement](#): FTA issued a notice proposing to rescind the National Transit Database’s weekly reporting requirement, which was created during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide rapid, nationwide snapshots of ridership and service levels. FTA explained that while the weekly data proved useful, it is not required by statute and no longer provides enough value to justify the administrative burden placed on transit agencies. Roughly 400 agencies have been submitting weekly reference data under the WE-20 form since it was finalized in 2023. Citing the Administration’s broader focus on deregulation, FTA determined that ongoing weekly reporting is unnecessary now that conditions have stabilized and annual and monthly NTD submissions remain in place. The agency is seeking **public comment through December 2, 2025**, before making a final decision.
-  [USDOT Announces Full State Engagement in SAFE ROADS Program](#): USDOT announced that all 50 states, DC, and Puerto Rico have joined [FHWA’s SAFE ROADS initiative](#), an effort focused on reducing roadway fatalities by improving high-traffic arterials and intersections (read AMPO’s summary [here](#) and FAQ update [here](#)). States identified 4,300 priority locations, spanning both urban and rural areas, for safety upgrades by the end of FY 2026, following a July 1 request from Transportation Secretary Duffy. The initiative emphasizes “back-to-basics” roadway safety and includes measures such as intersection redesigns, resurfacing, signal upgrades, distraction-reducing strategies,

vegetation and debris clearance, and other FHWA Proven Safety Countermeasures. FHWA noted that states relied heavily on Highway Safety Improvement Program data to target high-risk corridors.

- [\*\*USDOT Marks Crash Responder Safety Week with New Training Commitment:\*\*](#)  
USDOT announced a nationwide push to train 1 million first responders in Traffic Incident Management practices, highlighting ongoing risks faced by police, fire, EMS, towing personnel, and highway workers. Deputy Secretary Steven Bradbury and leaders from FHWA, FMCSA, and NHTSA emphasized that the initiative builds on the 800,000 responders already trained through FHWA's TIM program and aligns with broader federal safety efforts, including [FHWA's SAFE ROADS initiative](#), FMCSA's crash causal analysis program, and NHTSA's Move Over campaign.

## Notice of Funding Opportunities

### 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 the 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 the government shutdown)
    - **Estimated Application Due Date:** January 15, 2026

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





## National News

- [!\[\]\(f15d3c54be60b4fd0ce1da9fb3f67256\_img.jpg\) \*\*Federal Infrastructure Spending on Transportation, Four Years after the IIJA\*\*](#): A new Urban Institute analysis finds that the IIJA spurred a significant rise in highway spending, but did little to increase overall investment in public transit. While federal support for rail and other non-highway modes grew (i.e., largely through increased Amtrak funding), local and state transit spending fell sharply, dropping more than a third between 2021 and 2025. At the same time, non-federal highway spending rose by roughly 22 percent. Researchers concluded that states primarily used IIJA resources to expand road construction rather than invest in shared modes, echoing concerns raised by [Transportation for America](#) and previous [Brookings findings](#) about limited state accountability.
- [!\[\]\(7bf135d42c40a6430c927b2fd03d7659\_img.jpg\) \*\*NEVI Program Advances Despite Delays\*\*](#): A POLITICO analysis finds that USDOT's NEVI program (created to build a national EV charging network) advanced more slowly than early expectations but still played a central role in setting clearer standards and improving coordination across the charging industry. While fewer stations were built by 2025 than originally projected, NEVI requirements helped strengthen charger reliability, interoperability, and payment consistency. Although President Trump criticized the program during the 2024 campaign and initially paused it, NEVI continued because Congress embedded its structure in statute and core highway funding programs. After streamlining several provisions, the administration allowed it to move forward, and states are now progressing on implementation, with thousands of NEVI-funded chargers expected by 2027–2028. Analysts anticipate substantial expansion of the national network, concluding that despite early delays, NEVI has laid a more consistent foundation for long-term EV infrastructure growth.
- [!\[\]\(2bcc37677ea6b96900e4d746ad300082\_img.jpg\) \*\*Key Bridge Rebuild Could Reach \\$5.2 Billion\*\*](#): Officials estimate the reconstruction of Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge will cost between \$4.3 billion and \$5.2 billion, more than double the original \$1.7–\$1.9 billion estimate. A newly reviewed document also shows the project's completion date has slipped from 2028 to late 2030. State leaders attribute the cost increase to higher material prices, economic conditions, and added safety features, including enhanced pier protection and a larger main span to improve vessel clearance. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy has requested a discussion with Gov. Wes Moore (MD) about the rising costs.



## AMPO Opportunity

AMPO's [Intergovernmental Affairs \(IGA\) Group](#) is growing in 2026, and we welcome MPO staff working in policy, governmental affairs, and strategic communications to join. This subgroup of AMPO's Policy Committee focuses on strengthening our shared policy voice and supporting MPOs in communicating national and regional priorities clearly and effectively.

 **Interested in joining? Sign-up [here](#).**

The interest **form closes December 29**. Orientation will be held in early January, with new participants added to the roster beforehand. For any questions or for additional information, please contact Katie Economou, Legislative Director, at [keconomou@ampo.org](mailto:keconomou@ampo.org).

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## Recent Editions

### [November 12<sup>th</sup> \(2025\)](#)

- **Federal Focus (11/12):** Congress Passes Continuing Resolution.

### [November 6<sup>th</sup> \(2025\)](#)

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

### [October 31<sup>st</sup> \(2025\)](#)

- **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](#)