

The National Beat
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Feature Focus

LOT Coalition Letter to Congressional Leadership

[LOT Coalition Sends Letter to Congressional Committee Leadership on Reauthorization](#)

The Local Officials for Transportation (LOT) Coalition, which includes AMPO, has sent a letter to the leadership of the House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee and the Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee. The letter urges Congress to **expand and strengthen regional and local access to federal transportation funding in the next surface transportation reauthorization**.

AMPO encourages members to **share this letter with both their congressional delegation and their local partners** as they continue educating them on your region's priorities for reauthorization. Doing so helps amplify both AMPO's and the LOT Coalition's engagement efforts for a stronger, more locally responsive federal transportation program.

Now is a particularly important time in the reauthorization process. The House T&I and Senate EPW Committees are finalizing the base text for the next surface transportation bill, and Chairman Sam Graves (House T&I) [announced yesterday](#) that the legislation could reach the House floor for markup as early as this spring. Hearing from MPOs and their local partners now helps ensure our key priorities are reflected in what ultimately moves forward.

Read more on reauthorization developments below, and explore AMPO's reauthorization approach and tools in the [MPO Engagement Toolkit](#). Please reach out to Katie Economou, Legislative Director, at keconomou@ampo.org with any questions or for additional support.



Federal Roundup

Congress: Government Shutdown & Reauthorization

Administration & Agencies: USDOT & EPA Updates

NOFOs: Fed-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail



Congress

Congressional “Vibe” Check

Government Shutdown. On **September 30**, the White House formally ordered federal agencies to implement their shutdown plans after a short-term funding measure failed to pass the Senate. The shutdown is now in its sixth week, surpassing 35 days and becoming the longest in US history. Some Congressional leaders are signaling that a revised bill may move by the week’s end to reopen the government. *Read AMPO’s analysis of the shutdown effects on USDOT [here](#).*

- The ongoing shutdown is playing out differently than past ones. The administration has kept work moving on some priority initiatives and elements of its deregulation agenda, while [pausing activities in other areas](#), including renewable energy and environmental programs. Federal workers across multiple agencies have faced furloughs, and there are growing questions about long-term impacts on recruitment, retention, and institutional capacity. The administration argues that its approach aligns with budget priorities, while others have raised concerns about fairness and transparency in deciding which activities continue and which are suspended.
 - The administration has also not committed to guaranteeing back pay for furloughed federal employees, saying the issue remains “open to discussion” in negotiations over a continuing resolution. This follows reports that an early-October [Office of Management and Budget \(OMB\) memo](#) raised doubts about whether back pay would be automatic, despite a 2019 law requiring such payments after shutdowns.
- Within the Democratic caucus, there are visible splits over how to end the standoff. A growing group of Senate Democrats is in talks with Republicans on a short-term [deal to reopen federal agencies](#), while others want to hold out for an agreement that also extends Affordable Care Act insurance subsidies set to expire at year’s end. **Senate Majority Leader John Thune and other Republicans are aiming to move a revised funding bill by week’s end that could keep the government open into mid-December.**

Reauthorization. Authorizing committees are in the process of finalizing base legislative text. Senate EPW is expected to introduce and mark up its bill by the end of the year, with House T&I following early in the new year. Based on our understanding, base text in the House is already being shared between majority and minority for some components (including NHTSA and FMCSA titles), with the highway title likely to come last. Meanwhile, USDOT’s operating administrations (including FTA and FHWA) are preparing their reauthorization proposals for review by the White House OMB before formal submission to Congress. This is an opportune window for MPOs to elevate priorities directly with delegations (**Pro Tip:** use the [MPO Engagement Toolkit](#)).

-  **[Chairman Graves Shifts Reauthorization Timeline Due to Shutdown](#)**: House T&I Chair Sam Graves has announced that the committee now **plans to mark up the next surface transportation reauthorization early next year, with a goal of House passage by spring 2026**, pushing back earlier plans to move the bill by year's end. Graves attributed the delay to the prolonged shutdown.
 - Graves has described the forthcoming bill as a “traditional highway bill” focused on **core infrastructure** (roads, bridges, highways) with a strong emphasis on **permitting reform** to accelerate project delivery.
 - He has also signaled that the package will be narrower than the IIJA, saying, “we’re **not gonna be spending money on murals and train stations or bike paths or walking paths**. We’re going to spend money on traditional infrastructure, that’s roads and bridges.”
 - This framing may be concerning as many local governments and MPOs depend on federal programs (e.g., TAP, CMAQ, STBG, CRP, discretionary funds, etc.) to plan and deliver critical multimodal, community-scale projects.
 - The chairman has further indicated that the legislation will include **new annual fees on electric and hybrid vehicles** (roughly \$250 and \$100, respectively) as part of efforts to stabilize the Highway Trust Fund.
-  **[T4A Perspective on Reauthorization: Funding vs Outcomes](#)**: Transportation for America (T4A) argues that Congress’s reauthorization debates have become overly focused on funding levels rather than results. They contend that the current federal transportation program continues to underperform on core goals like safety, infrastructure condition, and accessibility, despite massive general fund infusions to sustain the Highway Trust Fund. T4A cites trends such as rising pedestrian deaths, deteriorating road and bridge grades, and persistent congestion and emissions. T4A attributes much of the problem to a lack of accountability among state DOTs, stating they spend flexible federal dollars on highway expansion instead of maintenance, repair, or multimodal improvements. T4A concludes that the US must refocus its transportation program on measurable results and accountability rather than simply increasing funding, urging Congress to make outcomes, not dollars, the benchmark for reauthorization.

What’s Making Headlines?

-  **[President Trump Urges Republicans to End Filibuster](#)**: President Trump called on Senate Republicans to eliminate the filibuster, arguing that failure to do so would jeopardize the party’s control of Congress and the White House in upcoming elections. President Trump warned that the 60-vote threshold would prevent Republicans from advancing their agenda and lead voters to blame them for gridlock. His comments came as Election Day voting took place in several key states. Senate Majority Leader John Thune rejected the proposal, saying the votes to end the filibuster “aren’t there.”



Administration & Agencies

USDOT

- [Judge Rules USDOT Can't Tie Transportation Funding to Immigration](#)**: A federal judge ruled that the USDOT cannot condition state transportation funding on cooperation with federal immigration enforcement. The judge wrote that USDOT exceeded its authority by attempting to link road, bridge, and highway funding to immigration-related compliance, stating that there was no clear connection between the two under existing law. The ruling follows a lawsuit filed by 20 states, led by California, after the administration issued a directive in April outlining the new funding condition (read AMPO's analysis [here](#)). McConnell had previously blocked the directive in June with a preliminary injunction ahead of a major grant deadline. The decision marks another court setback for the administration's efforts to revise how federal transportation funds are distributed. **Stay tuned for a deep dive of this case in this week's edition of the AMPO Friday Docket!**
- [Slow Grant Obligations = Larger August Redistribution](#)**: Delays in processing competitive IIJA grants are set to push a record amount of unspent federal highway dollars into next year's August redistribution. FHWA data show about \$7.8 billion in unused contract authority from prior years (i.e., mostly tied to INFRA, PROTECT, and bridge programs) will carry forward into FY 2026, shrinking new funding by roughly 12.6 percent. The slowdown, attributed to extended federal review processes, has erased gains made last year when Congress temporarily reduced backlogs through TIFIA transfers. With that fix no longer available, the August 2026 redistribution could again top \$8 billion, creating a late fiscal-year scramble for states to obligate funds quickly rather than strategically, complicating planning and project execution nationwide.

EPA

- [EPA's Cost-Benefit Analysis for Climate Rule Rollback on Vehicle Emissions](#)**: Newly released documents show that the White House OMB drafted about half of the cost-benefit analysis for [EPA's proposal to repeal climate regulations covering vehicle emissions](#). The section outlines a new economic approach, known as "revealed preference," a methodology which asserts that consumers' reluctance to buy electric vehicles means they do not value their benefits, such as fuel savings. Experts and former officials say it's unusual for the White House to dictate such analysis, which is typically led by agency staff and grounded in peer-reviewed research. Democratic state attorneys general have criticized the approach, saying it undermines EPA's independent judgment and could weaken the agency's legal standing. The final rule repealing the endangerment finding and associated vehicle standards is expected in December.

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: Transportation at the Ballot Box:](#) Voters in cities and counties nationwide weighed in on 82 transportation-related ballot measures, according to the Eno Center for Transportation. Most proposals were municipal and road-focused, continuing a pattern of local governments using bonds and sales taxes to maintain and improve critical infrastructure. Notable measures include Columbus, Ohio’s record [\\$1.9 billion bond package](#) with \$400 million for roads and sidewalks, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina’s [proposed 1% sales tax hike](#) to expand Charlotte’s transit system, and renewed debate over New Jersey’s Glassboro-Camden light rail project.

Recent Editions

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

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

[October 23rd \(2025\)](#)

[October 16th \(2025\)](#)

- **Federal Focus (10/16):** The Highway Funding Transferability Improvement Act & The Metropolitan Planning Enhancement Act

[October 9th \(2025\)](#)

- **Federal Focus (10/9):** USDOT IFR on DBE Program, USDOT Holds \$18 Billion in New York Transit Funding, FY 26 FHWA Apportionment of Funds

[October 1st \(2025\)](#)

- **Federal Focus (10/1):** Government Shutdown, Grant Cancellations, Obligation Deadlines on IIJA Funds, FTA FY 25 Apportionments, & CEQ NEPA Implementation Guidance

[August 29th \(2025\)](#)

- **Federal Focus (8/29):** APTA Survey Preliminary Results & USDOT RFI Extension

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

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

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