

The National Beat
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Feature Focus

SAFE ROADS FAQ Released and USDOT RFI Extension

SAFE ROADS FAQ Released

FHWA recently released the [official FAQ](#) for the SAFE ROADS initiative (Safe Arterials for Everyone through Reliable Operations and Distraction-Reducing Strategies). In early July, USDOT requested that **each state DOT, in coordination with their MPOs**, submit a list of arterial segments and intersections with significant safety, operational, or compliance concerns within **60 days** (read AMPO's summary of the initiative [here](#)).

The original **deadline is September 2, 2025**. However, FHWA **will allow a 30-day extension** if State DOTs notify their Division Office about constraints.

The FAQ clarifies a couple of lingering earlier unknowns:

- **No new funding is attached**, but existing Federal-aid highway funds (NHPP, STBG, CMAQ, HSIP) may be used subject to normal eligibility rules. States and local agencies may also contribute their own funds.
- State DOTs **should** coordinate with MPOs, **but there is no explicit requirement**. The FAQ notes that collaboration with MPOs and local agencies is “essential”, even if not mandatory.
 - The FAQ notes that submittals can draw from existing State Strategic Highway Safety Plans and Vulnerable Road User Safety Assessments, which already require MPO consultation.
- There is no minimum number of locations required. States may submit only a few high-priority projects if they choose.
- The Secretary's [original letter](#) asked State DOTs to submit a list of non-freeway arterial segments and intersections that will be “addressed” by the end of FY 2026.
 - **FHWA defines “addressed” to mean planned, programmed, or implemented safety and mobility improvements by that deadline**, and encourages near-term projects that can be implemented quickly to accelerate delivery and reduce fatalities.
- State submissions and progress updates will be publicly available on FHWA's website.

What's next?

Early feedback indicates that states are taking varied approaches to developing their submissions. In some cases, State DOTs are working closely with MPOs and local agencies to gather project ideas, studies, and data. In others, states are identifying projects internally and then sharing those lists only with MPOs that have affected segments. Still in other places, some MPOs report they have not been contacted by the state at all. Because coordination with MPOs is encouraged but not explicitly required, **the level of engagement is expected to differ across states** as the program moves forward.

[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?

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. Recent submissions include:

- *[National Association of Counties](#)
- *[National Association of Development Organizations](#)
- *[National Association of City Transportation Officials](#)
- [American Public Transportation Association](#)
- *[American League of Bicyclists](#)
- [Intelligent Transportation Society of America](#)
- [Transportation for America](#)
- [Association for Commuter Transportation](#)
- [American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials](#)
- [Governors Highway Safety Association](#)

Note: "*" includes certain AMPO and/or LOT coalition priorities in submissions

What we're seeing so far

Across submissions from these groups, some common threads are beginning to take shape:

- Greater reliance on **formula programs** over competitive grants.
- **Increased funding** to local governments, regions, and states.
- **Increased local control** for local and regional governments (including MPOs)
- Strong focus on **safety** across all network types.
- Calls to **streamline project delivery** (e.g., faster approvals, expanded categorical exclusions, procurement flexibilities, and NEPA process improvements).
- Support for **innovation** (digital infrastructure, new mobility tools, safety technologies).

So far, there are roughly **155 comments referencing empowering MPOs**

- Example submitters include cities, counties, towns; rural planning organizations; regional councils; MPOs; trail and safety advocates; bicycle organizations; watershed and environmental groups; economic development entities; and other community organizations.

Select MPO-Relevant Submissions

Federal agencies are also submitting comments to the docket. One we flagged of particular interest came from the Department of Defense (DoD). [DoD's submission](#) emphasized the importance of incorporating defense needs into MPO and statewide planning. **You can read AMPO's quick analysis of DoD's submission [here](#).**

Another relevant submission came from the [American Public Transportation Association](#) (APTA), which also submitted a proposal with provisions tied to MPOs ([see page 12](#) in APTA's Surface Transportation Authorization Recommendations document). APTA recommends statutory changes to MPO board composition and oversight. Their proposal would **mandate voting seats for public transportation providers** that collectively account for at least 75% of annual unlinked passenger trips within the Urbanized Area. It would **create a formal appeals process, requiring FTA and FHWA to jointly investigate procedural complaints against MPOs** within a set timeframe, with determinations subject to judicial review.

AMPO has [launched a survey](#) to gather input from MPOs on the implications of this proposal, including potential impacts on governance, board structure, planning authority, and interagency collaboration.

[Transportation for America](#) (T4A) also submitted a detailed response that includes provisions that affect MPOs. Their recommendations **call for MPOs and states to set and meet performance targets for system condition and safety, and to align TIPs and STIPs with those targets**. They also emphasize **greater transparency in project selection**, requiring clear justifications linking projects to federal goals, and encourage MPOs to use tools that evaluate the long-term impacts of programmatic investments on safety, emissions, equity, and economic outcomes.

Note: Many other submissions have also highlighted MPO provisions, largely in support of AMPO and LOT Coalition priorities, further reinforcing the importance of MPOs in shaping the next authorization.

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: Appropriations and Reauthorization Updates

Administration & Agencies: White House, GAO, EPA, and USDOT Updates

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



Congress

Congressional “Vibe” Check

With both chambers out for August recess, all eyes are on a high-stakes September where two major tracks will dominate the agenda for transportation funding: appropriations and surface transportation reauthorization.

- **Reauthorization:** Authorizing committees are in the process of drafting base legislative text. The introduction of reauthorization bills and Committee markups are anticipated in early fall.
 - **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.
- **Appropriations:** When lawmakers return, they’ll have just four legislative weeks to avert a government shutdown before the September 30th deadline. Currently, negotiators are meeting over recess, but the two chambers remain far apart on topline numbers and key programs. For transportation, the THUD bill will be top of mind (read AMPO’s [Senate](#) and [House](#) bill analyses).
 - **Republicans are getting creative:** House Republicans are coalescing around an unlikely tool to avoid a shutdown: **earmarks**. Once banned by fiscal conservatives, community project funding (i.e., “earmarks”) is now being promoted by Main Street Republicans and Freedom Caucus members. [The Main Street Caucus argues](#) earmarks are essential for vulnerable incumbents to deliver district wins, while some see them as a cheaper alternative to omnibus spending bills if paired with a flat-funded continuing resolution. **Some Republicans also want additional rescissions to cancel previously approved funds**, though the legality of certain proposals remains in question. Still, the shift highlights how earmarks, rebranded with tighter limits, have become a rare point of consensus as leaders search for a path to keep the government open without splitting the conference.



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Legislative Activity, Congressional Hearings, Markups, and Meetings

View the full [Senate Schedule](#). View the full [House Schedule](#).

Note: The House and Senate have adjourned for August Recess and will return in September.



Administration & Agencies

- [GAO Report on USDOT Funding Status and Risks Assessment for IIJA Funds](#): A new GAO report finds that USDOT needs to improve transparency and risk assessment in administering IIJA funds. Based on surveys of awardees, funding data, and agency review, GAO highlighted both progress and persistent challenges. **As of April 2025, 59% (i.e., \$260B) of IIJA funds had been obligated, with 52% of those dollars outlaid, though formula funds have moved faster than discretionary grants.** Awardees reported **difficulties with budgeting, NEPA reviews, Build America Buy America requirements, and staff capacity, all of which have been exacerbated by inflation.** While USDOT has launched new technical assistance tools and guidance, GAO concluded the agency lacks a consistent, department-wide risk assessment process and sufficient reporting to Congress and the public on obligations and outlays across programs. The report recommends **stronger communication and holistic risk management, which USDOT agreed to pursue.** The findings come as the administration imposes new oversight rules on federal grants, creating added uncertainty for discretionary programs ([read AMPO's analysis of the executive order on oversight of grantmaking here](#)).
- [EPA Extends Comment Period on Endangerment Finding Reconsideration](#): EPA has extended the public comment period for its proposed rule on reconsidering the 2009 Endangerment Finding and greenhouse gas vehicle standards. Originally set to close September 15, **the deadline has been pushed to September 22, 2025**, to align with Clean Air Act requirements following additional public hearing dates.
 - [Ann Carlson on EPA's Proposed Rule to Eliminate EPA's Endangerment Finding](#): Former NHTSA acting administrator Ann Carlson argues that EPA's proposed rule to eliminate the EPA's 2009 "endangerment finding" could inadvertently empower states to regulate vehicle greenhouse gas emissions. The finding, which underpins federal authority to regulate emissions as harmful to human health, is being targeted for rollback on grounds that greenhouse gases aren't covered under the Clean Air Act's vehicle emissions section. Carlson suggests that if the federal government relinquishes this authority, states may no longer be preempted from setting their own rules, potentially opening the door for 50 state-level standards. Carlson noted the paradox: federal retreat could force states to act. She highlighted that auto companies have avoided supporting the rollback, unlike the oil industry, since a patchwork of state regulations could pose challenges.
- [FEMA Extends Comment Period on Hazard Mitigation Plan Requirements](#): FEMA has issued a 30-day notice seeking public input on the extension of an information collection

tied to state, local, tribal, and territorial hazard mitigation plans. These plans are necessary for eligibility for certain types of FEMA non-emergency assistance. FEMA is asking for feedback on the necessity of the collection, the accuracy of burden estimates, and ways to reduce costs through technology. **Comments are due by September 22.**



USDOT

-  **FTA Proposes Removing Carbon Cost Metric from Transit Grant Reviews:** FTA announced it will drop the “social cost of carbon” measure from the rating criteria used in the Capital Investment Grants (CIG) program, the largest federal discretionary source of transit capital funding. Instead, FTA proposes reverting to a previous approach that evaluates projects based on EPA air quality standards in the region where a project is located. Administrator Marc Molinaro said the change aligns with recent executive orders from the Trump administration focused on rolling back prior climate and equity-focused requirements (i.e., [EO 14148](#), [EO 14154](#), [EO 14151](#)). The interim guidance is [open for public comment](#) until **September 2**, with [a broader RFI](#) surrounding suggestions for streamlining and enhancing the program are **due September 18**.
-  **FTA Warns New York MTA Over Worker Safety Failures:** FTA issued a warning to New York’s Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) for failing to address safety risks, after audits revealed deficiencies in the agency’s Roadway Worker Protection program and a rise in near-miss incidents. FTA ordered MTA’s New York City Transit division to submit a revised safety risk assessment within 30 days that incorporates recent incident data, applies accurate exposure measures, and better reflects actual operational risks. **Failure to comply could result in enforcement actions such as withholding up to 25% of federal funding.** The move follows FTA’s broader oversight of state and local transit safety programs under its Public Transportation Safety Program.
-  **FMCSA Investigation into Florida Truck Crash:** FMCSA has launched an investigation into a recent truck crash in Florida. The preliminary findings indicate the driver was not proficient in English and was improperly issued commercial licenses in two states. The FMCSA said both states failed to follow federal regulations. Secretary Duffy emphasized that stricter oversight of state licensing practices and English proficiency requirements is central to USDOT’s push to improve trucking safety.
-  **USDOT RFI for Research Ideas To Support Nationwide AV Deployment:** The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology (OST-R) is seeking information from stakeholders to inform coordinated national research supporting Automated Driving Systems (ADS) transportation technology deployment and realizing safe efficient operations on our Nation’s roadways. **Written submissions are due by October 17.**
-  **NHTSA Investigates Tesla Over Delayed Crash Reports:** NHTSA launched a new investigation into Tesla, citing multiple cases where the automaker submitted crash reports months late instead of within the required window. The probe will examine the reasons for the delays, whether other crashes remain unreported, and the effectiveness of Tesla’s corrective measures.

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

-  [Eno White Paper on Rising Highway Construction Costs](#): Eno published a white paper analyzing the sharp rise in highway construction costs since passage of the IIJA. The paper reviews both short-term and long-term drivers of cost escalation, ranging from supply chain disruptions, labor shortages, and materials price increases to state capacity constraints, higher borrowing costs, and regulatory factors. The analysis shows cost growth in 2022–2024 exceeded historic averages and highlights how different data sources capture unique cost drivers. **The report also explores how inflation erodes the value of federal dollars, forcing states and localities to adjust project planning and delivery.**
-  [Transportation Cuts Hit Home](#): Politico reports that, communities across the country, including many represented by Republicans who supported the recent One Big Beautiful Bill act (OBBBA), are facing major challenges due to rescinded federal transportation dollars (**read AMPO's OBBBA analysis [here](#)**). The legislation eliminated over \$2.2 billion in unobligated funds from the Neighborhood Access and Equity Grant Program (NAE). **Local officials described the cancellations as devastating setbacks and warned of reduced project scope unless replacement funding is found.** Supporters of the rescission, including USDOT, argued the program tied infrastructure funds to equity and climate goals rather than core needs. Still, critics noted many of the impacted projects focused squarely on congestion relief and safety, leaving state and local leaders scrambling for alternatives as construction timelines move forward.
-  [States Embrace Road Use, EV Fees to Boost Transport Revenue](#): States are **increasingly turning to road usage fees, EV surcharges, and tolling as fuel tax revenues decline**, with motor fuel taxes dropping from 41% of transportation funds in 2016 to 38% in 2023. Colorado and Virginia have raised road use charges, while Hawaii, Georgia, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland imposed or increased annual EV fees, with some as high as \$260 to \$290 by 2028. Elsewhere, Indiana is seeking federal authority to

toll interstate highways, and Illinois is studying congestion pricing, reflecting a broader push for alternative, long-term revenue sources to maintain roads and bridges.

-  [Micromobility Report Shows Record Growth](#): Shared micromobility in North America hit a record 225 million trips in 2024 (i.e., a 31% jump from the previous year). A recent study found growth across large and small cities, with e-scooters and e-bikes making up the majority of fleets and 74% of riders using services to connect to transit. Public funding plays a critical role, with nearly half of systems publicly or non-profit operated and one-fifth relying on state or federal grants.
-  [SB Round-up of Reauthorization Priorities](#): Streetsblog reports that transportation groups are encouraging the public to comment on USDOT's reauthorization RFI (see Feature Focus for details). Key priorities flagged include giving local governments and MPOs more direct funding (regional transportation block grant program), reducing local match requirements, allowing federal funds to carry over year to year, shifting permitting toward outcome-based measures, and prioritizing safety and maintenance.

Recent Editions

[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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