

The National Beat

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Federal Roundup

Congress: Appropriations, Reauthorization, & Legislative Action

Administration & Agencies: USDOT Updates

NOFOs: Fed-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail, TTPSF, BUILD



Congress

Congressional “Vibe” Check

Appropriations. With the [current Continuing Resolution](#) expiring January 30, Congress is facing a tightening clock. Senators returned to Washington emphasizing the need to make progress on the nine remaining FFY 2026 appropriations bills. Senate leadership continues negotiating unanimous consent to advance a multi-bill funding package, while House Republicans are weighing whether to move one or two bills to the floor next week.

The House still has seven bills left to pass, including Transportation-HUD (THUD), and House Appropriations **Chair Tom Cole has signaled particular interest in ensuring THUD is included in whatever bipartisan package can realistically advance** before the deadline.

Reauthorization. Reauthorization activity continues to intensify as committees refine draft language and work through early outlines of the next surface transportation bill.

Where things stand:

- House T&I majority and minority staff are actively trading draft language.
 - NHTSA, FMCSA, and now FTA titles have circulated internally. The highway title is expected next.
- Once base text is released, likely early in 2026, proposals not already included will face a significantly steeper path through amendment.

On the Administration side, FHWA, FTA, and other operating administrations are sending their proposals to the Office of Management and Budget. This is the final step before formal transmission to Congress.

House timing and dynamics

- **Now:** Staff-to-staff exchanges of base text are underway across House T&I. Other key house Committees (e.g., Ways and Means, Appropriations) and off-committee members are beginning to identifying their reauthorization priorities.
- **Winter 2026:** Bill text is expected to be released, with committee markups anticipated in Q1.


- **Early Spring 2026:** Potential floor consideration. [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.

A note on timing: Given the volume of work Congress faces (e.g., the remaining FY 2026 appropriations bills, expected policy debates, and the historical trend of surface transportation bills missing their statutory deadlines) a continuing resolution is certainly possible. Even so, MPOs should operate under the assumption that reauthorization may move on time. This engagement window will not open twice, and once base text is released, the opportunity to shape major provisions narrows quickly.

What Can MPOs Do? This period remains a critical window for MPOs to educate congressional delegations, reinforce national and regional priorities, and highlight how strong MPO leadership can improve federal project delivery and community outcomes in the next authorization cycle (visit AMPO's reauthorization hub [here](#)).


- **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.
- **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.

Congressional Buzz on Reauthorization



-  **REPAIR Infrastructure Act Introduced:** A group of congressional Democrats has introduced the [REPAIR Infrastructure Act](#), a proposal to reauthorize and significantly expand USDOT's Reconnecting Communities Program starting in FY 2027. Led by Senators Blunt, Rochester, Merkley, and Warnock, along with Representatives Ryan and Figures in the House, the bill is framed as a continuation of the IJA's efforts to address long-standing transportation barriers. The sponsors highlight the demand for the existing program (i.e., nearly 1,500 applications and an average of \$4.6 billion in unmet requests per year) as



evidence of continued national need. The legislation would authorize \$3 billion annually from the Highway Trust Fund through FY 2031, formally direct USDOT to prioritize equity, economic development, community engagement, and anti-displacement principles, and make REPAIR-eligible activities allowable under existing federal-aid highway formula programs. Supporters include Smart Growth America, the National League of Cities, the Rails to Trails Conservancy, and a broad range of other national organizations. The bill aims to set priorities ahead of surface transportation reauthorization by reinforcing themes of safety, connectivity, and more community-centered infrastructure decision-making.

Thought Leadership & National Perspectives on Reauthorization

-  [New AASHTO President: Georgia DOT's Russell McMurry](#): Georgia DOT Commissioner Russell McMurry has been elected AASHTO's 2025–2026 president. He emphasized a “back to basics” agenda focused on reauthorization, project delivery, and safety as states prepare for the next federal surface transportation bill. His priorities include advocating for a formula-centered federal program, improving delivery through targeted reforms like expanded delegation and strategic BABA implementation, and supporting state DOTs in leveraging technology and partnerships to reduce roadway fatalities. He and newly elected vice president Marc Williams of Texas DOT will lead AASHTO's push for a formula-focused federal program, more efficient project delivery, and strengthened safety efforts nationwide.

What's Making Headlines? A number of transportation issues on the Hill are drawing attention this week outside of reauthorization.




-  [Senate Commerce Advances Key USDOT Nominee](#): The Senate Commerce Committee voted 18–10 to advance Ryan McCormack, the nominee for Undersecretary for Policy at the USDOT. McCormack currently serves as USDOT's deputy chief of staff and previously worked for Rep. Scott Fitzgerald and then-Rep. Sean Duffy, giving him deep experience in congressional and departmental policy roles. The panel also approved NTSB member Michael Graham for another term and advanced Jared Isaacman to lead NASA. McCormack and Graham now head to the full Senate for floor consideration.
-  [House E&C Committee Advances Bills to Overhaul the Clean Air Act](#): A House Energy and Commerce subcommittee advanced seven bills that together would amount to the most significant rewrite of the Clean Air Act in decades, prompting strong opposition from Democrats and environmental groups. The package includes proposals to overhaul **EPA's process for setting air quality standards**, expand presidential authority to waive pollution rules for semiconductor and critical mineral facilities, lengthen the review cycle for smog and soot standards, **limit use of the newly tightened particulate matter standard**, weaken New Source Review requirements, exempt prescribed burns from certain compliance calculations, **and restrict EPA's ability to review federal projects such as highway construction**.

-  [Senate Majority Energy–Water Bill](#) : Senate Republicans’ draft FY 2026 Energy and Water Development bill joins the House in rejecting the administration’s proposed 23 percent cut to the Army Corps of Engineers’ civil works program, instead providing a 12.5 percent increase over last year. The bill mirrors the House’s approach on most water-resources items and introduces a new structure with activities that would receive \$249 million (i.e., well above both the House level and FY 2025 funding). Both chambers also keep the statutory requirement to allocate \$3.47 billion from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund. According to Eno, the report arrives as new Treasury data show the Corps still carries an extraordinary construction backlog, with more than \$36 billion in unspent balances.
-  [Friedman, Malliotakis Introduce Transit Safety and Affordability Bill](#): Rep. Laura Friedman (D-CA) and Rep. Nicole Malliotakis (R-NY) unveiled the bipartisan [Safe and Affordable Transit Act](#), a proposal creating a new competitive federal grant program to help transit agencies hire additional police officers and invest in safety infrastructure such as surveillance systems, operator shields, and station visibility improvements. The bill responds to rising assaults on riders and transit workers and aims to strengthen public confidence while easing the financial burden on local agencies.





Administration & Agencies

USDOT



-  [Corridor ID Program: Policy Updates](#): FRA will host a December 18 webinar to share updates in the Corridor Identification and Development (CID) Program, the national framework for planning and advancing intercity passenger rail corridors. The session will highlight two major policy updates tied to completing Service Development Plans (SDPs), a core requirement for moving corridors toward implementation.
-  [FRA Temporary Waiver for Automated Track Inspection Testing](#): FRA announced it approved a five-year temporary waiver allowing railroads to broaden testing of automated track inspection (ATI) technology. The waiver aims to generate data on how ATI can complement traditional visual inspections by detecting defects or hazards that may be overlooked in routine surveys. Secretary Duffy and FRA Administrator David Fink emphasized the program’s potential to improve safety and efficiency by integrating advanced diagnostics into existing inspection practices. Under the waiver, railroads will operate ATI systems with minimal changes to current procedures but must meet new data collection and reporting requirements to support FRA’s evaluation.
-  [USDOT & Maryland on Bridge Costs and Beltway Congestion](#): Secretary Duffy again urged a direct conversation with Maryland Governor Wes Moore as federal officials raise concerns about sharply rising estimates for rebuilding Baltimore’s Francis Scott Key Bridge. Projected costs have climbed from the state’s initial \$1.7–\$1.9 billion estimate to potentially more than \$5 billion, prompting repeated inquiries from USDOT about oversight

and project management. The bridge, destroyed in a 2024 shipping collision, is federally mandated to be fully funded. Duffy also highlighted a new FHWA [Request for Information](#) seeking proposals to accelerate reconstruction of the American Legion Bridge, signaling heightened federal focus on major Maryland–Virginia corridor bottlenecks.


-  [FTA Orders CTA to Act on Safety](#): FTA issued a Special Directive to the Chicago Transit Authority after a recent violent attack on a Blue Line passenger, citing long-standing concerns about elevated assaults and unsafe conditions across the system. In a letter to Illinois Governor JB Pritzker and Mayor Brandon Johnson, FTA Administrator Marc Molinaro said CTA must quickly update its Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan, develop a security enhancement strategy, and implement new measures to increase law enforcement presence **or risk the withholding of federal funds**. The directive outlines firm deadlines in December 2025 and authorizes FTA to closely monitor CTA’s compliance through meetings, inspections, and technical assistance.
-  [USDOT Administrators Outline Priorities at AASHTO Annual Meeting](#): FHWA, FTA, and FRA leaders used the AASHTO 2025 Annual Meeting to outline their priorities and emphasize close partnership with state DOTs. FHWA Administrator Sean McMaster highlighted USDOT’s “back to basics” focus on safety, efficient project delivery, and securing a long-term surface transportation bill with stable funding. FTA Administrator Marc Molinaro underscored transit safety and the agency’s work to streamline reviews and focus on outcome-driven project oversight so systems of all sizes can deliver reliable service. FRA Administrator David Fink reiterated rail’s dual mission of safety and network improvement, noting that stronger coordination among freight, passenger, and transit operators will be key to delivering rail projects efficiently despite rising costs.

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
-  [Tribal Transportation Program Safety Fund \(TTPSF\)](#): Eligible projects described in section 148(a)(4) are strategies, activities, and projects on a public road that are consistent with a transportation safety plan and that (i) correct or improve a hazardous road location or feature, or (ii) address a highway safety problem. TTPSF emphasizes the development of strategic transportation safety plans using a data-driven process as a means for Tribes to identify transportation safety needs and determine how those needs will be addressed in Tribal communities.
 - **Deadline:** January 15, 2026
 - **Note:** Multi-jurisdictional groups are eligible.

Forecasted USDOT NOFOs

-  **Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Grant Program:** The goal of the program is to fund projects that will have a significant local or regional impact and improve transportation infrastructure. BUILD grants will be awarded on a competitive basis, per statute, for planning or constructing surface transportation infrastructure projects that will improve safety; environmental sustainability; quality of life; mobility and community connectivity; economic competitiveness and opportunity including tourism; state of good repair; partnership and collaboration; and innovation.
 - **Deadline:** February 24, 2026
 - **Note:** The Department intends to amend this NOFO to provide more details on application requirements.

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



National News

-  **Newsom Administration Unveils Proposal for Bay Area Transit Funding:** California Governor Gavin Newsom's administration has outlined a new plan to give Bay Area transit agencies temporary financial relief by allowing them to borrow against state funds already awarded for long-term projects. The Department of Finance proposal would let the Metropolitan Transportation Commission advance those capital dollars and issue short-term loans to help operators cover deep operating shortfalls through 2026. The administration says more than \$1 billion in awarded funds could be flexed, depending on project timelines and capital needs.

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.

Recent Editions

[December 5th \(2025\)](#)

- **Federal Focus (12/5):** CAFE Standards & Transportation Assistance for Olympic and World Cup Cities Act of 2025

[November 20th \(2025\)](#)

- **Federal Focus (11/20):** Reauthorization

[November 12th \(2025\)](#)

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

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

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

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