



The National Beat

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2026 Midterm Election Outlook

Background

With the House and Senate both in recess, and with Congress having very few legislative days left this year, it's important to understand the current congressional landscape as the midterm elections approach. In both chambers, Republicans hold narrow majorities. This will prove to be an important election as changes in party leadership in either chamber will have significant impacts on what legislation is introduced, what legislation is passed, and which Senators or Members of Congress will sit on different committees. For transportation in particular, changes in party control could impact surface transportation reauthorization given legislation will not be introduced until 2027.

***TL;DR:** The 2026 midterm elections could reshape the makeup and leadership of Congress, with potential changes in both chambers and on key transportation committees. These changes have important implications for transportation policy and the direction of surface transportation reauthorization. This makes this a critical time for MPOs to engage their congressional delegations both before and following the 2026 midterm elections.*

House of Representatives

In the House, Republicans currently hold a 219-212 (4 vacant) majority over House Democrats. In this November's midterm elections, there are predicted to be roughly 19-21 seats considered as toss ups, with either party in contention to win the seat. This figure has significantly shifted after various [redistricting efforts across several states](#) (AL, CA, FL, LA, MO, NC, OH, TN, TX, and UT). These changes have resulted in roughly [10 new Republican-leaning seats](#) for this year's election. Even so, early forecasts vary on outcomes with some showing Democrats reclaiming a narrow majority and others predicting a larger swing in total seats. Given these varying predictions, please review some of the forecasts linked [below](#).

Senate

In the Senate, Republicans currently hold a 53-47 majority over Democrats. Every six years, one-third of the Senate is up for reelection, meaning 35 seats are on the ballot for the 2026 midterm elections (two of which are special elections in Florida and Ohio). Currently, there are a few contentious races where forecasters are calling toss-ups between Republican and Democrat nominees. Specific states to monitor include Michigan, Iowa, Alaska, Ohio, Maine, and Texas. Overall, forecasts have the Senate race as a toss-up with either party in a position to claim a majority.

Party Leadership

Whether the House flips or not, House party leadership is likely to remain unchanged. If Democrats regain control of the House, current Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) would become Speaker of the House. For Republicans, House leadership would remain the same as well, with Rep. Mike Johnson (R-LA) becoming Minority Leader. In the Senate, leadership is also likely to remain the same with Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and Sen. John Thune (R-SD) continuing their



roles as Minority or Majority Leader. While currently these positions are unlikely to change, Senate Democrats plan to hold a vote on future party leadership following the midterm elections. Sen. Schumer will likely retain his position in party leadership, but [Senators Chris Van Hollen \(D-MD\) and Brian Schatz \(D-HI\) have also expressed interest in the position.](#)

Key Committees

Among key committees, there could be significant changes to the House T&I Committee. Notably, with Rep. Sam Graves (R-MO) retiring, Rep. David Rouzer (R-NC) would look to become either Chair or Ranking Member of House T&I. For Democrats, there are currently no expected changes regarding Rep. Rick Larsen (D-WA) becoming either Chair or Ranking Member.

Senate EPW may also see leadership changes. Among Republicans, Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) is likely to retain her position as either Chair or Ranking Member, and among Democrats, it is expected that current Ranking Member Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) will pursue an alternative Senate committee leadership role. As of right now, Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA) are being considered to replace Sen. Whitehouse as either Ranking Member or future EPW committee Chair.

To better understand how midterm elections might impact your MPO's congressional delegation or specific Members of Congress or Senators on key committees. Please refer to the following election forecasts:

- [General Polling Trends](#)
- House Election Forecasts:
 - [Race to the WH](#)
 - [270toWin](#) (aggregation)
 - [The Cook Political Report](#)
 - [FiftyPlusOne](#)
- Senate Election Forecasts:
 - [Race to the WH](#)
 - [270toWin](#) (aggregation)
 - [The Cook Political Report](#)
 - [FiftyPlusOne](#)
- [General Midterm Election Information](#)

MPO Post-Election Engagement

Following the November midterm elections, MPOs will have an opportunity to engage with their congressional delegations, strengthen existing relationships, and build relationships with newly elected Members and their staff. Congressional offices, committee staff, and committee membership may change following the elections, making early engagement important as MPOs introduce their organizations, educate new Members and staff on local transportation priorities, and establish relationships heading into the new Congress. AMPO will be developing engagement materials to help MPOs prepare for post-election outreach and effectively engage with their delegations.



Congress

Congressional “Vibe” Check

Reauthorization. Reauthorization activity continues to accelerate as committees refine draft language that shapes the next surface transportation bill.

Where things stand:

- **House T&I.** The **BUILD America 250 Act** was passed out of committee on May 21 with a **62-2** vote following a nearly 15-hour markup that considered nearly 300 amendments. The **bill authorizes approximately \$580 billion**, with 90% available through formula funding, a significant shift from the IIJA's heavier reliance on competitive grants.
 - The bill still needs action from the House Ways and Means Committee on its revenue provisions before it can move to the House floor.
 - Full House consideration of **the bill will have to wait until after August recess** once Members of Congress return in September.
- **Senate.** EPW is the furthest along of the Senate authorizing committees. Chair Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) is [targeting September for release of the committee's highway title](#) and has indicated that EPW needs to move before the Banking, Commerce, and Finance committees finalize the transit, rail, safety, and revenue portions of the broader package. Her goal is to complete the full bill by the end of the year.

Introduced Legislation Related to Reauthorization

Whether you want to see what marker bills could be included in the next surface transportation reauthorization or are curious about what Congress is working on, AMPO is tracking all relevant legislation that has been introduced since December 2025. Please refer to our legislation tracker to see what bills have been introduced, who introduced them, and what they would do.

[→ 119th Weekly Congress Legislation Tracker](#)

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

- [Senate Republicans Introduce \\$127 billion Reconciliation 3.0 Budget Resolution:](#) Senate Republicans released a FY2027 budget resolution for reconciliation 3.0 that directs 11 Senate committees to propose up to \$127 billion in new spending for defense, agriculture, election-related programs, and other priorities, with proposals due Sept. 11. However, GOP



Republican senators remain divided over the package and its timing, making action in September uncertain as lawmakers face a crowded legislative agenda and concerns about vulnerable members taking difficult votes ahead of the November election.

-  [House and Senate Democrats Send Letter Expressing Concerns over Stalled Transit Project Funding](#): The letter urges FTA and OMB to immediately advance stalled Capital Investment Grant (CIG) projects in Boston and Los Angeles, arguing that the delays are unjustified, potentially violate statutory requirements, and waste taxpayer resources. Lawmakers also request a timeline by Aug. 18 and call for the Administration to expedite eligible CIG projects, including 11 projects expected to seek grant agreements later this year.
 -  [Congress to Likely Consider Permitting Reform Legislation this September](#): Senate negotiators from both parties are working toward bipartisan permitting reform legislation, with bill text potentially coming in September, focused primarily on energy projects but with possible implications for transportation through changes to Clean Water Act and National Historic Preservation Act permitting. Panelists on this Eno webinar suggested the legislation could gain enough bipartisan support to pass but will likely need to ride on a different piece of legislation, such as the NDAA or government funding legislation, rather than surface transportation reauthorization.
 -  [Update on Autonomous Vehicle \(AV\) Legislation and Regulations](#): The AV regulatory landscape is rapidly evolving as NHTSA streamlines vehicle standards and exemptions, develops national safety guidance, and works toward a more consistent federal framework, while Congress remains divided over issues such as labor impacts and state preemption. States and cities continue to lead on deployment and regulation, with DC and California pursuing new frameworks that highlight the need to balance AV innovation with safety, accessibility, workforce impacts, and local transportation needs.
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Administration & Agencies

USDOT

- [USDOT Intergovernmental Affairs Monthly Stakeholder Meeting Recap](#): USDOT highlighted several July priorities, including major airport infrastructure investments, new transit grant opportunities, expanded commercial driver programs, and efforts to advance maritime, aviation, highway, and automated vehicle initiatives. FHWA extended the FY25–FY26 ATTAIN application deadline, while FTA announced new competitive grant opportunities totaling more than \$650 million. Several agencies also advanced new safety and regulatory initiatives, including FMCSA and FRA English-language proficiency requirements, NHTSA automated vehicle policies, and PHMSA pipeline repair standards. **USDOT also highlighted that their intergovernmental affairs team will be attending the AMPO conference next month in Sacramento.**
-  [Review of Amtrak's NextGen Acela and Expectations for Future Fleet Deployment](#): The delayed rollout of Amtrak's NextGen Acela fleet initially was established to make up for the lost capacity due to an aging fleet, rather than generally expanding service. This has been apparent with ridership remaining relatively steady since the new fleet was introduced. With 13 NextGen

train sets now in service and weekday trips increasing from 26 to 32, the key test will be whether continued fleet deployment produces sustained increases in service capacity and ridership rather than simply recovering lost capacity.

- [!\[\]\(5ba1bc70d78f05c00988641e5e513c62_img.jpg\) **White House Nominates New Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Congressional Affairs at USDOT:**](#) President Trump has nominated Leslie Becera, USDOT's principal deputy assistant secretary for congressional affairs, to become the department's assistant secretary for governmental affairs. Becera, a former staffer for House T&I Chair Sam Graves (R-MO), is not currently expected to face a Senate confirmation hearing under the fast-track process, though a senator can request one.

FMCSA

- [!\[\]\(065aacad479feea1b3f501fa02b79a7a_img.jpg\) **FMCSA to Codify English-Language Proficiency \(ELP\) Standards:**](#) FMCSA has proposed codifying ELP standards for commercial drivers, including mandatory out-of-service orders for drivers who cannot adequately speak, read, or understand English, which the agency estimates could affect about 9,000 drivers annually. The proposal would create a uniform national enforcement standard, strengthen requirements in US-Mexico border zones, and formalize existing guidance while several states pursue their own ELP enforcement laws.

HUD

- [!\[\]\(444b1eae2189e5cd8d096594c07a0a6e_img.jpg\) **HUD Releases New Opportunity Zones Activity Map \(OZAM\):**](#) The OZAM is an interactive web map that helps governors, state agencies, and other stakeholders explore housing, economic, and neighborhood data for census tracts eligible for nomination in the 2026 Opportunity Zone designation cycle. Users can select tracts, view longitudinal and ACS-based indicators, layer overlays like 2018 OZ designations or HUD sites, and download the underlying eligible tracts dataset.



National News

- [!\[\]\(c33cb967c8fc4f5e27188a389b621c8e_img.jpg\) **Criticism of Congestion Studies:**](#) The article argues that widely cited congestion studies significantly overstate the costs of traffic congestion by using unrealistic free-flow baselines, overstating exposure to severe congestion, and assigning excessive value to small travel-time savings. It contends that these studies are biased toward automobile travel and highway expansion while overlooking the benefits of multimodal transportation, compact development, and transportation demand management, suggesting actual congestion costs may be closer to \$100-\$200 per motorist annually rather than \$1,480.
- [!\[\]\(38e1383487ca0f0e9e2c9378b9dbcae7_img.jpg\) **Analysis of Hawaii's Odometer-Based Road Usage Charging System:**](#) Hawaii and the UK are moving toward simple, odometer-based road usage charges for electric vehicles as fuel-tax revenues decline, while other jurisdictions are exploring different systems that can account for where and when vehicles travel. The article argues that there is no single approach to road user

charging, with different technologies balancing privacy, cost, revenue collection, and congestion management depending on a jurisdiction's goals.

-  [**The Positive Outlook for AV Adoption and Roadway Safety:**](#) The article argues that autonomous vehicles (AVs) could significantly improve road safety in New York by reducing crashes caused by human errors such as speeding, distraction, and impairment, while also expanding mobility for seniors, people with disabilities, and residents of lacking transit access. It calls for New York to expand AV pilot programs with clear safety benchmarks and public reporting, using the resulting data to develop a statewide framework for testing and deployment rather than allowing concerns over limited or mixed evidence to halt the technology.
 -  [**Increases in Housing Supply Could Reduce VMT:**](#) A new UC Berkeley and UCLA study finds that building more housing in California could reduce VMT by up to 1% statewide, with even greater reductions possible if new housing is strategically located in transit-accessible, walkable, and neighborhoods with fewer cars. The study argues that while regional housing plans are generally directing growth toward areas with lower driving rates, local governments need stronger state guidance, data, and technical assistance to more effectively use housing development as a tool to reduce driving and advance California's climate goals.
 -  [**Congressional Budget Office \(CBO\) Releases Study Showing Decline in Federal Excise Tax Receipts and Its Implications on the Highway Trust Fund \(HTF\):**](#) The CBO's new paper explains that federal excise tax receipts, including HTF fuel taxes, are declining relative to GDP because tax rates have largely remained flat while inflation, changing consumption patterns, and improved vehicle fuel efficiency reduce revenues. CBO also noted that gasoline tax revenues are highly sensitive to assumptions about fuel economy and economic growth, while noting that excise taxes are regressive, meaning lower-income households paying a larger share of their income in excise taxes.
 -  [**The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation \(ACHP\) Advances Proposed Changes to Historic Preservation Reviews:**](#) The ACHP is advancing proposed changes to Section 106 regulations that would narrow the scope of historic preservation reviews, give lead agencies greater authority to resolve adverse effects, streamline consultation, and provide more discretion over public participation. The changes could significantly affect transportation projects, particularly rail and transit, which undergo Section 106 reviews at much higher rates and generally face longer review timelines than highway and aviation projects.
 -  [**Tying Vision Zero Goals into All Planning and Policy Decisions:**](#) A [new study](#) from the Vision Zero Network, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, and other partners finds that cities often fail to integrate traffic safety into all planning, policy, and funding decisions, contributing to persistent severe and fatal crashes. The report recommends applying a Safe System approach to every project by reducing vehicle exposure, speeds and mass, and opportunities for conflicts, with examples including New York City congestion pricing and San Francisco's Van Ness BRT.
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Notice of Funding Opportunities



-  [**Innovative Coordinated Access and Mobility \(ICAM\) Pilot Program:**](#) Provides competitive funding to support innovative projects for transportation disadvantaged populations that will improve the coordination of transportation services and non-emergency medical transportation services.
 - **Deadline:** Sept. 9, 2026
-  [**Buses and Bus Facilities Infrastructure Program:**](#) The Grants for Buses and Bus Facilities Competitive Program (49 U.S.C. 5339(b)) makes federal resources available to states and direct recipients to replace, rehabilitate and purchase buses and related equipment and to construct bus-related facilities, including technological changes or innovations to modify low- or no-emission vehicles or facilities.
 - **Deadline:** Sept. 21, 2026
-  [**Low or No Emission Grant Program:**](#) The Low or No Emission competitive program provides funding to state and local governmental authorities for the purchase or lease of zero-emission and low-emission transit buses as well as acquisition, construction, and leasing of required supporting facilities.
 - **Deadline:** Sept. 21, 2026
-  [**Bus Safety, Accessibility, and Innovation Research Program:**](#) Supports the development of standard designs and prototypes that will make existing and new buses safer for operators, riders and vulnerable road users, as well as more accessible for passengers.
 - **Deadline:** Sept. 28, 2026

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

Recent Editions

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