



The National Beat

August 21, 2026

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Feature Focus

Census Bureau Update on the Department of Commerce's Disclosure Avoidance Policy

[Census Bureau Update on the Department of Commerce's Disclosure Avoidance Policy](#)

Background

On June 4, the Department of Commerce issued an Administrative Order on “[Disclosure Avoidance for Statistical Products](#).” The order would specifically prohibit the use of noise infusion as a disclosure avoidance method, make coarsening (rounding, aggregating, grouping, or use of ranges) the preferred data methodological approach, in addition to data suppression as a last resort. The intention of the order was to protect the confidentiality of individuals and organizations when the Census Bureau publishes statistical products such as the American Community Survey (ACS) or Census products. On Aug. 17, the Census Bureau released an update on how key statistical products will be impacted and ensured that guidelines will be released to outline how the Census Bureau will implement the policy.

 See AMPO's Analysis of the order [here](#).

***TL;DR:** The Commerce Department's new disclosure-avoidance policy will shift Census Bureau products away from noise infusion and toward coarsening and suppression, which could reduce the geographic and demographic detail available to MPOs for planning. The Census Bureau released an update stating that they do not expect major impacts to existing products or release schedules, MPOs should continue monitoring implementation as changes to products such as the ACS and 2030 Census could affect local-level planning data.*

Context

Since June, the main concern with the administrative order is understanding how changes in disclosure avoidance methods will impact key Census Bureau products that MPOs rely on for core planning functions and general planning activities such as:

- Forecasting regional population, employment, household, and land use growth
- Developing and updating travel demand models
- Evaluating long-term transportation investments and infrastructure needs
- Updating socioeconomic inputs for MTPs and LRTPs
- Analyzing industry, workforce, and commuting patterns and how communities connect to employment centers
- Assessing transportation investment impacts on minority, low-income, elderly, and disabled populations in accordance with federal civil rights requirements
- Understanding regional freight activity and economic trends

Many of these activities rely on Census Bureau products like the ACS, Decennial Census products, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD), Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES), and Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) regional statistics ([access AMPO's data source and core products chart here](#)). Key concerns centered on the idea that coarsening, or rounding/aggregating data, could lead to the potential loss of small-area geographic and



demographic details critical to ensuring statistical precision and that data is accurate at the local-level for planning work.

Census Bureau Update

On Aug. 17, the Census Bureau released an update on how the Administrative Order will impact current statistical methods and which Census products will be impacted. Regarding disclosure avoidance methods, the Census Bureau reiterated what methods the Administrative Orders would and would not allow.

Allowed:

- **Coarsening:** Coarsening (aggregating, rounding, ranges) is now the preferred disclosure avoidance method for all statistical products. This action specifically reduces the detail of available data.
- **Suppression:** Suppression is permitted only as a last resort for data products. This involves withholding certain data from publication.

Concern:

Coarsening and Suppression can reduce data precision within small geographic areas or population groups.

Not Allowed:

- **Noise Infusion:** Previous disclosure avoidance method. This method added random changes within data, or “noise”. This method helped ensure individual confidentiality by applying controlled randomness to data.

Impacted Data Products

The update clarifies that the order will impact all Census Bureau statistical products and specifically only all new products moving forward (no existing products will be impacted). **They further clarify that data release schedules are not expected to be significantly impacted,** especially for highly cited data products.

The following data products were provided updates on how they may be impacted:

- **2030 Census:** The Census Bureau will continue researching ways to better assess and communicate disclosure risks and understand data users’ needs. A demonstration data product is expected in mid-2027 for public feedback, which will help inform testing and ultimately the 2030 Census.
- **ACS:** The Census Bureau is researching new disclosure-avoidance methods and will gradually transition to methods that comply with the new order, with a full transition expected by 2029.
- **Demographic Surveys:** Surveys currently using noise infusion will undergo disclosure-risk assessments, with the Census Bureau researching and identifying new compliant methods.
- **Economic Indicators:** Most economic indicators use suppression and are not expected to be affected. The Quarterly Financial Report is an exception and will return to using suppression.
- **County Business Patterns (CBP):** CBP has historically relied on noise infusion, but the Census Bureau is exploring alternative disclosure-avoidance methods.



- **LEHD:** Products that use noise infusion because it is required under state data-sharing agreements will continue using it until those agreements are updated. This is currently common for this specific product as it uses state unemployment insurance data.

MPO Considerations

In alignment with [AMPO's previous analysis on this order](#), it will be important for MPOs to continue monitoring guidance that is released generally on this Administrative Order or by the Census Bureau. While the update indicates that data release schedules may not be significantly impacted, AMPO's concerns around data aggregation and coarsening still remain regarding the methods potential impact on core planning activities. Further, the update provides little insight on specific implications for core Census products, a concern that will need to be further clarified in future guidance or guideline documents. AMPO will continue to monitor this order and provide updates as guidance is released.

[Member Spotlight: Broward MPO, AI and Transportation Planning](#)

Greg Stuart, Executive Director at Broward MPO and AMPO Board Member, contributed an article to the Eno Center for Transportation's Special Edition publication on AI in transportation. He discussed how Broward MPO is developing [SMART METRO](#), an AI-enabled planning platform supported by a \$2 million USDOT SMART Grant, to help planners integrate fragmented transportation, land use, demographic, housing, and environmental data more efficiently.

By testing across two Broward County planning use cases, the tool showed that AI can help identify patterns, connect datasets, and reduce the time needed for data collection, analysis, mapping, and reporting by an estimated 50 percent. The project also highlights that AI's effectiveness depends on data quality, interoperability, and collaboration among agencies, while outputs still require human validation and professional judgment. The general takeaway for MPOs is that AI can serve as a **planning assistant rather than a decision-maker**, with successful adoption requiring strong data governance, common standards, transparency, public accountability, and human oversight.



Federal Roundup

Congress: *Reauthorization and Legislative Activity*

Administration: *USDOT & OMB*



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.

The Buzz on Reauthorization

- [!\[\]\(86b7331e04fe40a56bcff2e9c065738b_img.jpg\) **Reps. Jefferson Shreve and David Valadao Joined US Chamber of Commerce Roundtable on Surface Transportation Funding:**](#) The US Chamber of Commerce held roundtable discussions with local business leaders and [Reps. David Valadao \(R-CA\)](#) and Rep. Jefferson Shreve (R-IN) as part of its Keep America Moving national infrastructure tour. Both events emphasized the importance of long-term, predictable federal transportation funding and built support for Congress to pass a long-term surface transportation reauthorization bill.
- [!\[\]\(92f87f30b7499b35d0173f4346c498d6_img.jpg\) **Senate Democrats Discuss Personal Priorities for the Next Surface Transportation Reauthorization:**](#) Senate Democrats are signaling several priorities for the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization, including **protections against federal grant claw backs, stronger guarantees that congressionally authorized funding reaches communities, and increased investment in Mega, freight, and port infrastructure programs.** On the funding side, Senate Finance Committee Democrat Ron Wyden indicated that transportation revenue will be an important issue, though he declined to preempt Finance Chair Mike Crapo's position.
- [!\[\]\(497b6684f704c0aa6fbea9f0fd4d56c7_img.jpg\) **Former Member of Congress Rodney Davis and Government Affairs VP at ARTBA's Insight on Reauthorization:**](#) Panelists at a Lincoln Forum and Union League Club of Chicago event said they expect the Senate-passed surface transportation extension through Dec. 11 to clear the House by Sept. 30, but a second extension could be needed depending on the outcome of the November midterms. Former Illinois Congressman Rodney Davis (who served on the House T&I Committee) and Dean Franks, senior vice president of congressional relations at the American Road and Transportation Builders Association, suggested a second extension could run through September 2027, while expressing concern that the Senate has not yet shown the level of preparation typically seen ahead of a reauthorization.

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.



Administration & Agencies

USDOT

- [!\[\]\(9bf097d682561b2ffd12d57a40ca73b1_img.jpg\) **Coalition of States File Lawsuit Against USDOT's Commercial Motor Vehicle Enforcement:**](#) A coalition of 19 states and DC are suing USDOT and FMCSA to block access to AAMVA's Commercial Driver's License Information System, which contains sensitive data on roughly 17 million commercial drivers, citing privacy and federalism concerns. The states argue that forcing AAMVA to provide the data could disrupt CDL licensing nationwide, while Secretary Duffy says federal access is necessary to identify unqualified and dangerous truck drivers.
- [!\[\]\(51d3868eac81c232f6ef399d2bd16077_img.jpg\) **Secretary Duffy Releases Road Trip Video Series:**](#) Secretary Duffy's [**six-episode family road-trip series has been released on YouTube**](#) after being delayed over ethics concerns, particularly because production costs were covered by a nonprofit whose sponsors include USDOT-regulated companies such as Boeing and Toyota. Although USDOT says no taxpayer funds were used and ethics attorneys cleared Secretary Duffy's participation, Senate Democrats and a government watchdog have called for an inspector general investigation into potential conflicts between the Secretary's personal and official activities.

OMB

- [!\[\]\(d328bb1c8b293dce97ce8ae48fe06a23_img.jpg\) **Broader Implications of the Proposed OMB Rule for Cities and Academia:**](#) OMB's proposed federal grants rule would give political appointees greater authority to terminate grants that conflict with administration priorities, raising concerns among schools, universities, nonprofits, and state and local governments about funding uncertainty and politicized grantmaking. Nearly 500,000 comments have opposed the proposal, and a bipartisan Senate stopgap funding bill would delay its implementation until Dec. 11, giving opponents time to push for a permanent prohibition, though the House's position remains uncertain.



National News

- [!\[\]\(3168ddc4389f6b417dd71f084513be9c_img.jpg\) **The League of American Bicyclists Release Report on Biking and Cyclist Accommodations on Amtrak Lines:**](#) The League of American Bicyclists' [**new report**](#) evaluates all 46 Amtrak lines on bike accommodations, finding that two lines, the Cascades and Gold Runner, received "Excellent" scores, while two-thirds of bike-service lines fell into the "Moderate" range and seven lines offered no bike service. The report highlights opportunities to improve bike-train connections through Amtrak's new Airo trainsets, better reservations and bike capacity, and local investments in station access, wayfinding, and connections to trails.
- [!\[\]\(17332056424eb04f01463711418ba65a_img.jpg\) **Eno Center for Transportation's \(Eno\) AI in Transportation Special Edition Publication:**](#) On Aug. 21, Eno released a special edition publication on AI in transportation. The edition covered various AI initiatives, including Boston's Project Green Light, which uses AI to optimize

traffic signals while keeping engineers responsible for reviewing recommendations and balancing impacts on pedestrians, cyclists, and traffic networks; AI applications in short-line railroads for autonomous operations, infrastructure inspections, predictive maintenance, shipment tracking, and cybersecurity; and Texas DOT's AI strategy and state DOT workforce research, which emphasize responsible governance, workforce training, and identifying tasks best suited for AI automation or human augmentation. The series also emphasized the continued importance of human oversight for transportation safety and examined how autonomous EVs and robotaxis could require new road-use fees as they increase roadway use without contributing to traditional gas-tax revenues.

-  **[US Does Not Sign UN Declaration to Reduce Traffic Fatalities:](#)** The UN General Assembly adopted a near-unanimous declaration calling for countries to cut traffic deaths and injuries in half by 2030 through measures such as safer road design, stronger public transit, and better road-safety coordination, with the US as the only country voting against it. The vote reveals growing international support for a public-health approach to road safety, while the US opposition reflects broader concerns about international climate and transportation policies.
-  **[Case Study on Local Preemption for Local Housing Development:](#)** The article compares two state-level approaches to increasing affordable housing: Massachusetts' proposal to allow starter homes on appropriately serviced lots, and California's case involving state-designated housing that was blocked by local infrastructure and land-use decisions. It argues that state preemption can be useful when it removes local barriers to housing while preserving decentralized decision-making, rather than replacing local decision-making with state-level control over where and how development occurs.
-  **[Study Finds Most Data Centers Are Located in Not Rural, but Metropolitan Areas:](#)** A New York University study found that 97.5% of the 4,283 US data centers it mapped are located within metropolitan or micropolitan areas, contrary to usual beliefs that they are located in rural areas. DC, Chicago, Dallas-Fort Worth, New York and Phoenix regions account for nearly one-third of all facilities. The researchers found that existing power and broadband infrastructure, including sites near former coal plants and designated Energy Communities, strongly influences data center locations, while noting that limited data on facilities and their energy use makes it difficult to assess their broader community and environmental impacts.
-  **[Report Finds New York Congestion Pricing Did Not Significantly Impact Air Quality:](#)** New York City's Health Department found that congestion pricing had little measurable effect on air pollution during its first year, with no significant increase in pollution in neighborhoods such as the South Bronx and Staten Island where drivers might have diverted to avoid tolls. While some environmental groups view the program's transit investments and reduced vehicle traffic as a long-term air-quality benefit, the report found that observed pollution changes could not be attributed to congestion pricing, and a separate Columbia study found a 2% increase in fine particulate matter in the South Bronx.



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

- [August 14 \(2026\)](#)
- [August 7 \(2026\)](#)
- [July 31 \(2026\)](#)

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