The National Beat

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AMPO

Feature Focus

Congress' Lame Duck Wishlist, Regional Water Quality and Infrastructure Planning Survey Memo, & AMPO's New 120th Congress MPO Engagement Toolkit

Congress' Lame Duck Wishlist

When Congress returns to DC on Nov. 9, they will be entering the lame duck period following the midterm elections. With 2026 funding deadlines approaching and a limited legislative calendar, Congress will face competing priorities, including appropriations, defense legislation, reconciliation, permitting reform, and surface transportation reauthorization. The following overview looks at each of these competing priorities and their potential implications for the timing of surface transportation reauthorization.

> ***TL;DR:*** *Congress will return for a compressed lame duck session with competing legislative priorities and limited floor time. While congressional leaders have expressed interest in advancing surface transportation reauthorization before the end of the year, the remaining legislative hurdles make enactment in 2026 unlikely. If Congress does not enact a new authorization bill before the current extension expires on Dec. 11, lawmakers will need to address the expiration of program authorities and funding. This means MPOs should likely expect surface transportation reauthorization discussions to continue into 2027.*

Oversight

Oversight and investigative efforts could consume significant congressional bandwidth during the lame duck period and in the next Congress, particularly if Democrats regain control of either chamber. House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) said that his party is **already planning an investigatory agenda for the new Congress**. Early indications suspect that Democrats would conduct investigations into actions from the DOJ, DHS, and the **Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) and their role in federal employee layoffs**.

For House T&I, both Ranking Member Rick Larsen (D-WA) and potential incoming Chair David Rouzer (R-NC) have expressed interest in transportation-related oversight. Rep. Rick Larsen specifically said he would be **interested in conducting oversight of USDOT** and whether their decisions to slow down or make cuts to transit, bicycle, and other infrastructure projects were based on politics or policy. For Republicans, **Rep. David Rouzer said that he would want to conduct oversight over China-linked technology** and connected vehicles, with a specific focus on the maritime sector. Similarly, following **the cancellation of nearly $1 billion in federal funding** by an OMB pocket recission, it appears both parties will look to question the cancellation of federally appropriated funding.

Defense

On July 22, the **House passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)**, the annual appropriations legislation for defense spending that would authorize $1.5 trillion in FY2027. In the Senate, a July effort to advance the legislation was blocked by Senate Democrats over concerns of the war in Iran. **Like other FY2027 appropriation packages in the Senate**, full consideration of the

legislation will have to wait until the lame duck period where it will compete with other major appropriation packages and legislative priorities and potentially remain stalled until geopolitical tension is settled. When Congress returns, it is likely that this remains a high priority as it may serve as a **vehicle for the SAVE America Act, a White House and Republican priority.**

Reconciliation 3.0

On July 22, the House passed a $95 billion budget resolution with funding for the Pentagon, farmers, specific national security issues, and some elements of the House's voting reform legislation, the **SAVE America Act**. While the House passed the resolution, the Senate has been hesitant to consider it among other competing priorities. After leaving for the November election recess period, the **Senate has yet to consider the resolution**, leaving the post-election season likely contentious as there will be both pressure from the White House and House to bolster defense spending through the reconciliation process, especially if Democrats regain control of either chamber in the new Congress.

➡️ Read AMPO's Analysis of Reconciliation 3.0 **here**.

Permitting

On Sept. 30, the **Senate EPW and Energy and Natural Resources (ENR) Committee introduced the Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act (BAAJA)**. While the legislation was a long-awaited reform to federal permitting and NEPA review processes, it will face significant hurdles from both internal and external pressures during the lame duck period. Additionally, given EPW's role in developing the highway title of the surface transportation reauthorization, delays in permitting negotiations will consume significant committee time away from other issues such as surface transportation reauthorization.

Internally, BAAJA faces potential hurdles during the lame duck period. Post-election changes in congressional leadership could affect negotiating priorities and leverage between the chambers. Additionally, Senate EPW Ranking Member Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) has expressed concerns about the **Department of the Interior's reconsideration of a permit for an offshore wind project in Rhode Island**, potentially complicating support for the agreement. Externally, **environmental groups** have also criticized the legislation, arguing that it would weaken environmental protections and **limit opportunities to challenge certain infrastructure projects**.

➡️ Read AMPO's Analysis of BAAJA **here**.

Farm Bill

Another major multi-year legislative package pending consideration is the Farm Bill, which sets national food and farm policies. **On April 30, the House passed their version of the Farm Bill. In the Senate, Democrats have stalled the legislation** due to the lack of provisions addressing funding cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) made by the **One Big Beautiful Bill Act**. While the legislation was **advanced out of the Senate Agriculture Committee**, it will require 60-votes to advance out of the Senate – an effort that will likely face greater Senate Democrat opposition based on the SNAP funding cuts, giving it an uncertain path forward.

Transportation

Surface transportation reauthorization will remain a major outstanding legislative priority. While the IIJA was set to expire on Sept. 30, 2026, the **Continuing Resolution passed by Congress** extended the current authorization and funding period through Dec. 11. The extension provides additional time for Congress to negotiate a new authorization bill, but likely means that the legislation will not be finalized until 2027. **Speaker of the House Mike Johnson (R-LA) has expressed interest in passing a transportation reauthorization bill during the lame-duck period**, but the legislation would still need consideration from the House Ways and Means Committee before being brought to the full chamber.

House T&I Ranking Member Rick Larsen has also expressed interest in completing reauthorization before Dec. 11. If negotiations extend into 2027, he has indicated that **the committee could target June for House passage**. The legislation would then face additional negotiations and competition with other legislative priorities, including an **upcoming FAA reauthorization**.

Outlook for Reauthorization

Although congressional leaders have expressed interest in advancing surface transportation reauthorization during the lame duck period, the remaining legislative steps and competing priorities present significant challenges. Congress must also determine how to address expiring program authorities and funding if a new authorization bill is not enacted before Dec. 11. Given the limited legislative calendar, competing priorities, and outstanding negotiations, MPOs should prepare to see surface transportation reauthorization discussions extend into 2027, meaning continued engagement with congressional delegations and new Members of Congress following November's midterm elections will be critical.

🔗 Regional Water Quality and Infrastructure Planning Survey Memo

In collaboration with the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC), AMPO gathered information from MPOs and regional organizations across the country on their involvement in water quality and water infrastructure planning.

The survey was developed to gain a clearer understanding of the types of water-related planning activities that regional organizations are undertaking, the funding sources they utilize, and the barriers or gaps that may limit regional participation. It also includes questions about the Clean Water State Revolving Fund's Water Quality Management Planning Grants included in Section 604(b)/205(j) regional pass-through program, including how these funds are distributed and used across states. In the coming weeks, a full survey report will be shared across both AMPO and NARC memberships. In the meantime, the following **memo provides an overview of some of the initial findings.**

🔗 AMPO's New 120th Congress MPO Engagement Toolkit

With the 2026 midterm elections around the corner, AMPO is excited to share our new **120th Congress MPO Engagement Toolkit**, designed to help MPOs get ready for the new Congress,

make connections, and bring their regional transportation priorities into conversations on Capitol Hill.



Whether you're welcoming a newly elected member, reconnecting with a returning member, or getting ready for the next surface transportation bill, we've pulled together the tools to help you get started, including:

- **The Congressional Compass** – a tool to help you find your representatives and to explore the congressional map.
- **Outreach Materials** – customizable one-pagers to showcase your region and federal transportation investments as well as ready to use outreach materials and tips to engage congressional offices. This includes:
    - **New Member Welcome Letter** – introduce your MPO, highlight transportation investments in your region, and welcome newly elected Members of Congress.
    - **Returning Member Letter** – reconnect with returning representatives and senators, share regional updates, and establish a connection for the new congressional session.
    - **Congressional Staff Introduction Email** – a quick, customizable email to introduce your MPO to legislative or district staff and request an introductory meeting.

Federal Roundup

Congress: *Reauthorization and Legislative Activity*
Administration & Agencies: *USDOT & BTS*

Congress

Congressional "Vibe" Check

Reauthorization. Reauthorization discussions have slowed significantly as the November midterm elections approach and as Congress enters a month-long recess to campaign in-state. The continuing resolution extended the IIJA deadline to Dec. 11, giving Congress two paths forward: pass a full surface transportation reauthorization ahead of that deadline, or pass another extension that pushes reauthorization into 2027.

Where things stand:

- **House. House T&I Ranking Member Rick Larsen (D-WA) said that he wants to pass BA250 out of the House by the end of 2026, but if it moves during the next Congress, they will try to pass the legislation by June 2027.**

- *House T&I Subcommittees:* With House T&I Chair Sam Graves (R-MO) retiring, Republicans will look for new leadership. Currently, Rep. David Rouzer (R-NC) is likely to take the gavel. To replace Rep. Rouzer's position as Highways and Transit Subcommittee chair, Rep. Mike Bost (R-IL) is said to have expressed interest, while for Democrats, Rep. Salud Carbajal (D-CA) is said to similarly be interested in the position as either Subcommittee Ranking Member or Chair.

- **Senate.** EPW Chair Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) announced that her committee would not release legislative text for the next surface transportation bill until after the midterm elections, meaning reauthorization will have to wait until the November lame duck period. Worth noting, **Sen. Capito during a pro forma session on Oct. 19 said that her committee could release text in December 2026.**

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.

- 🔗 **Environmental Groups Oppose the Senate's Permitting Legislation:** The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is seeking changes to the **Senate's Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act (BAAJA)**, expressing concerns about provisions affecting NEPA, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and historic preservation law, as well as limits on executive authority to obstruct projects after permitting approval. While supporting the bill's electricity transmission provisions, NRDC outlined five areas for revision, project certainty, judicial remedies, water quality, species protections, and tribal consultation on historic preservation, ahead of a potential Senate floor vote.

  While **environmental groups have voiced some concerns** over BAAJA, there has been some uncertainty around bipartisan negotiations to pass the legislation in the Senate. One of the critical pillars that helped secure a deal between Senate Republicans and Democrats was a commitment from the White House to not disrupt offshore wind projects. In early October, the Interior Department reopened an effort to cancel permits for a Rhode Island offshore wind project, which has led **Senate EPW Ranking Member Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) and other Senate Democrats to have hesitancies to move the legislation forward**.

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Administration & Agencies

USDOT

- 🔗 **USDOT and FHWA Request Comments for an Information Collection Related to the Great American Digital Corridors (GADC) Program Cooperative Agreement:** FHWA is seeking public comments on a proposed information collection for the FY 2026 GADC Program, which provides up to $20 million in competitive funding with a 100% federal share to support digital infrastructure along federal-aid highways. Eligible applicants include MPOs and other public, private, nonprofit, and academic entities, with academic institutions and other private or nonprofit organizations required to apply as part of a consortium; FHWA estimates approximately 20 applications annually, requiring 10 hours each, and invites comments on the necessity, accuracy, and potential burden of the collection by **December 15, 2026**.
- 🔗 **FRA CRISI Grant to Fund Autonomous Freight Railcar Project in Missouri:** The FRA awarded the City of Columbia, Missouri, a $16.2 million CRISI grant to modernize the Columbia Terminal Railroad and support the deployment of two autonomous freight railcars. The project will include track and infrastructure upgrades and phased testing, with the goal of demonstrating the safety and operational benefits of autonomous railcars for short-line railroads nationwide. More broadly, **USDOT and the FRA announced $2.3 billion in CRISI awards** in 45 states for over 2,000 miles of tracks. A total of 105 projects received federal funding with an additional $1.9 billion in funding provided by state, local and private partners. A list of all the awarded projects can be found **here**.
- 🔗 **USDOT Announces $1.6 Billion in Emergency Relief Program Funding:** USDOT announced more than $1.6 billion in Emergency Relief Program funding to repair roads, bridges, and other transportation infrastructure damaged by natural disasters across 34 states, DC, and US territories. The largest allocations include $873 million for North Carolina following Hurricane Helene, $81 million for Hawaii following severe storms, and $52 million for Texas to address storm damage and bridge washouts.

Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS)

- 🔗 **BTS Releases Updated County and Congressional District Transportation Profiles:** The BTS updated its County Transportation Profiles and Congressional District Transportation Profiles in September 2026, providing free, publicly accessible data on transportation infrastructure, demographics, housing, and economic conditions. The updates incorporate 2024 geographic boundaries and Census estimates, 2025 airport and bridge data, and 2026 rail and maritime data, offering MPOs and other transportation stakeholders updated information to support regional planning and infrastructure analysis.

National News

- 🔗 **The Urban Institute Release Federal Infrastructure Funding Tracker:** The Urban Institute analyzed federal infrastructure funding across nine categories to assess where investments

have gone and whether they have reached communities with the greatest needs. Findings show that funding distribution varies by sector, with some programs targeting underserved communities while others tend to favor places with existing infrastructure, transportation patterns, or greater access to resources.

- 🔗 **The Urban Institute to Hold Webinar on Transit Funding and Community Infrastructure Need:** On Nov. 9, the Urban Institute will be holding a webinar to examine how IIJA funding has been distributed across states, counties, and metropolitan areas to assess whether federal investments are addressing critical infrastructure and transportation access gaps. This virtual event will present findings on public transit funding, demonstrate the tracker's capabilities, and bring together local transit leaders and national experts to discuss how the next transportation reauthorization can better address communities' needs. The webinar will take place from 2 to 3 pm (ET). You can find more information and register **here**.
- 🔗 **California Passes Legislation to Align Transportation Spending with Climate Goals:** California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed **SB 1087**, updating the state's SB 375 sustainable communities planning law to extend greenhouse gas reduction targets through 2045 and require MPOs to update their Sustainable Communities Strategies every eight years, with a progress report after four years. The law also strengthens the connection between regional climate goals and state transportation funding, requiring additional considerations for certain projects in regions that fall short of emissions targets, while aiming to reduce administrative burdens and shift regional planning toward implementation.
- 🔗 **Why US Roads Have Larger Vehicles:** The article argues that USDOT's revised vehicle classification standards may change how SUVs and pickups are categorized without necessarily reducing their size or number. The article identifies several structural reasons for the dominance of larger vehicles, including fuel economy rules that favor light trucks, automakers' higher profits from SUVs and pickups, and trade barriers such as the 25% tariff on imported light trucks, while questioning whether the administration's changes will meaningfully encourage smaller, safer vehicles.

💲 Notice of Funding Opportunities

- 🔗 **Prioritization Process Pilot Program (PPPP):** The PPPP program provides discretionary grant funds that can be used to develop and implement a publicly accessible, transparent, data-driven prioritization process for the selection of projects in Statewide and Metropolitan Transportation Plans (i.e., S/LRTP, MTP, RTP) and Transportation Improvement Programs (STIP/TIP).
    - **Deadline:** Oct. 30, 2026
- 🔗 **Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program (WCPP):** The WCPP provides funding to eligible entities for projects seeking to improve safety of the traveling public by reducing the number of wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVC) and, in doing so, improve habitat connectivity for terrestrial and aquatic species.
    - **Deadline:** Nov. 16, 2026

➡️ Access **AMPO's NOFO Tracker here**.

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Recent Editions

- **October 16** (2026)
- **October 9** (2026)
- **October 2** (2026)

➡️ View all past editions of the **National Beat** Policy Newsletter **here**

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