The National Beat

October 30, 2026

In This Issue

Feature Focus 2

AMPO's 120th Congress MPO Engagement Toolkit 2

Federal Roundup 3

Congress 4

Congressional "Vibe" Check 4

National News 7

Recent Editions 8

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AMPO

Feature Focus

AMPO's 120th Congress MPO Engagement Toolkit

AMPO's 120th Congress MPO Engagement Toolkit

With the 2026 midterm elections approaching and the 120th Congress on the horizon, MPOs will be entering a critical period for educating new and returning Members of Congress. With surface transportation reauthorization discussions likely to continue into 2027, congressional outreach will remain especially important. This is an opportunity for MPOs to build relationships, share reauthorization priorities, and provide local examples of what is working well under current transportation programs and where improvements are needed.

Through AMPO's congressional engagement, several messages have resonated well with congressional offices, especially those emphasizing **project delivery, economic growth, local technical assistance, and the effective use of federal transportation dollars**. The following themes may be helpful for MPOs to incorporate into their own congressional outreach, alongside specific examples and priorities from their regions:

- **MPO Role in Project Delivery:** MPOs play a critical role in moving projects from planning toward implementation. They help identify transportation needs, establish regional priorities, coordinate funding, and build the pipeline of projects that ultimately move into engineering and construction. A lot of the work needed to deliver projects happens well before construction begins, and Metropolitan Planning (PL) funding supports that foundation.
    - **Message:** Increasing PL funding and eliminating the local match would help MPOs dedicate more resources to this work and support faster, more effective project delivery.
- **Technical Assistance and Support for Local Governments:** MPOs serve as critical technical resources and partners for local governments, helping communities turn transportation needs into projects ready for investment. MPOs bring regional data, planning expertise, and established partnerships to the table, helping local governments identify funding opportunities, develop competitive grant applications, navigate federal requirements, and move projects through planning and preparation.
    - **Message:** Reauthorization should increase PL funding and provide greater flexibility in its use to strengthen MPOs' ability to deliver these services and help local governments move projects forward.
- **Local Infrastructure and Economic Development:** MPOs connect transportation investments to broader regional economic priorities, including workforce access, freight movement, housing, and connections to jobs and businesses. Local roads and bridges are essential to these connections but often face significant infrastructure and maintenance needs. Investing in local infrastructure also helps ensure major state and federal investments deliver benefits throughout surrounding communities.
    - **Message:** Increasing Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) formula funding, including funding available for local and regional priorities, would help address statewide infrastructure needs, improve the condition of local roads and bridges, and support regional economic growth.

- **A Stronger, More Connected Transportation System:** A successful transportation system depends on state DOTs, MPOs, and local governments having the resources to fulfill their responsibilities and working together to make investments count. MPOs are central to this effort, connecting federal, state, and local priorities, coordinating investments across jurisdictions, and helping move projects from planning to delivery. Strong MPOs help ensure transportation investments meet local and regional needs, advance national transportation goals, and support economic growth and long-term prosperity.
    - **Message:** Reauthorization should strengthen every level of the system while empowering MPOs to bring the pieces together. Providing MPOs with the funding, authority, and flexibility they need will strengthen state and local partnerships, align transportation investments with regional and national priorities, and help communities grow and thrive.

Learn more about AMPO's reauthorization priorities **here**.

Congressional Delegation Engagement

To better prepare MPOs to engage their congressional delegations with the approaching midterm elections and 120th Congress, AMPO developed the new **120th Congress MPO Engagement Toolkit**. This toolkit was designed to help MPOs make connections and to bring regional transportation priorities to 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.

Remember: *Congressional engagement does not need to be complicated. Sharing a local project example, explaining how your MPO helps communities deliver transportation improvements, or making a connection with congressional staff can go a long way toward demonstrating the value of regional transportation planning.*

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Congress: *Reauthorization and Legislative Activity*
Administration & Agencies: *USDOT, EPA, Census Bureau*

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 recently passed 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 replace Rep. Graves as either Committee Chair or Ranking Member. 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.

The Buzz on Reauthorization

- 🔗 **Will an Autonomous Vehicle (AV) Framework Be Included in Surface Transportation Reauthorization?:** Federal legislation on autonomous vehicles remains stalled, with House Energy &Commerce Committee Chair Brett Guthrie (R-KY) expressing support for the **SELF DRIVE Act (H.R. 7390)** but indicating it would need to be attached to another legislative vehicle, such as surface transportation reauthorization, to advance. The E&C Committee ultimately did not include the legislation in their surface reauthorization package, and with surface legislation likely facing another extension, action on an AV legislative framework appears unlikely before 2027.

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.

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➡️ 119th Weekly Congress Legislation Tracker

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

- 🔗 **How BAAJA will Impact Federal Transportation Projects:** The recently introduced Senate bipartisan permitting legislation, BAAJA, would potentially accelerate transportation project delivery and reduce costs by streamlining NEPA and federal permitting requirements while maintaining environmental reviews for capacity-expanding highway projects. The legislation would particularly benefit safety improvements, state of good repair projects, and locally administered competitive grant projects by reducing unnecessary review delays, helping agencies deliver critical infrastructure investments more efficiently.
- 🔗 **BAAJA Faces Tribal Pushback:** Tribal advocacy groups are opposing the Senate's bipartisan permitting legislation, arguing that the proposed changes to the National Historic Preservation Act would undermine tribal sovereignty and limit their ability to challenge permitting decisions. Although Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-NM) says that he is unwilling to consider amendments, tribal leaders are pushing for significant changes or removal of the historic preservation provisions ahead of an expected Senate vote in November.
- 🔗 **Senate Looks to Find Legislative Path for Short Line Railroad Track Maintenance Tax Credit:** Sen. Mike Crapo (R-ID) sponsored **S. 1532**, which would expand the Section 45G tax credit for short line railroad infrastructure improvements as the tax credit currently faces an uncertain path to passage due to competing tax related legislation. The bill would increase the credit's per-mile cap from $3,500 to $6,100 and expand eligibility for certain acquired track to help short line railroads address deferred maintenance costs.
- 🔗 **Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) Releases Reports on State Impacts from the Expiration of IIJA Advance Appropriations:** Sen. Maria Cantwell is releasing **state-by-state reports** detailing the impacts of the expiration of IIJA advance appropriations, including cuts to freight, aviation, rail, maritime, and economic development infrastructure funding. Democrats are expected to push for restoration of the funding during year-end appropriations negotiations, though support from Senate Republicans remains uncertain.

  The IIJA's advance appropriations funded discretionary grant programs such as CRISI, RAISE/BUILD, SS4A, CIG, and the State of Good Repair program – totaling to roughly $36.8 billion in federal surface transportation funding. In September, Congress passed a continuing resolution that extended government funding until Dec. 11 – this did not include IIJA advance appropriations, meaning they expired on Oct. 1. As we approach the new Dec. 11 government funding deadline, conversations on Capitol Hill will resume surrounding the status and viability of extending advance appropriations. **AMPO will continue to engage and educate congressional staff on the importance of maintaining the funding levels established by advance appropriations and the importance of the programs that expired**.

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- 🔗 **House Republicans to Hold Leadership Vote Following Midterm Elections:** House Republicans are scheduled to hold leadership elections on Nov. 10, following a candidate forum, to select their leader, whip, conference chair, and other leadership positions, and nominate a Speaker of the House if they retain their majority. Members must declare candidacies by noon on Nov. 6, with conference rules and steering committee proceedings scheduled for Nov. 11–12.
- 🔗 **Highway Trust Fund (HTF) Saw Revenue Increase but Still Faces Long-Term Funding Challenges:** The Eno Center for Transportation released an analysis of FY 2026 funding for the HTF, showing that HTF tax revenue increased 11.4% ($5.0 billion) in FY 2026 compared with FY 2025, while outlays saw little growth meaning overall account balances were improved, slightly delaying projected insolvency. Despite higher revenues and lower-than-expected spending, the HTF still faces significant deficits totaling $25.6 billion, with the article highlighting potential transfers from the Highway Account to the Mass Transit Account and ongoing concerns about limited public access to federal transportation tax receipt data.

Administration & Agencies

USDOT

- 🔗 **USDOT Loosens Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS) for Autonomous Vehicles (AVs):** USDOT and NHTSA are proposing updates to FMVSS No. 108 to reduce unnecessary regulatory requirements, increase design flexibility, and maintain vehicle safety, including changes to headlamp testing and requirements for lighting controls and indicators. The proposal would also allow optional cyan-colored automated driving system (ADS) marker lamps and tailor certain requirements for vehicles without manually operated driving controls to reduce regulatory burdens and costs. This action indicates additional interest by USDOT to foster AV innovation through loosened standards not currently applicable for non-AV vehicles.
- 🔗 **Yonah Freemark at the Urban Institute Submits Public Comment on the Proposed CIG Policy Guidance:** Yonah Freemark, PhD, a lead researcher on Fair Housing, Land Use, and Transportation at the Urban Institute, recently submitted a public comment on the proposed CIG policy guidance. The comments are centered around two concerns with the policy guidance: adjustments to cost effectiveness criteria and its impact on project ratings and subsequently their investment levels, and the proposals changes to scoring preferences that would prioritize regions with high marriage and birth rates – potentially disproportionately increasing investment in wealthier communities where transit is less utilized.

  AMPO will be submitting comments in collaboration with the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) and the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO). Once our joint public comments are submitted, AMPO will be releasing a comment letter template for MPOs to submit comments of their own on the proposed CIG policy guidance and its impact on your region.

EPA

- 🔗 **EPA Releases an Updated MOVES6 for Emissions Modeling:** The EPA has released MOVES6, an updated emissions modeling tool that replaces MOVES5 for estimating air pollution from on-road vehicles and non-road equipment, incorporating revised EV adoption projections, vehicle activity data, energy consumption rates, and emissions corrections. The EPA has also released **updated policy and technical guidance** for using MOVES6 in State Implementation Plans (SIPs) and transportation conformity.

Census Bureau

- 🔗 **The US Census Bureau Release the ACS' 1-Year Estimates:** The ACS covers a broad range of topics about social, economic, housing, and demographic characteristics and the Census Bureau recently released the 2025 1-year estimates. A few of the highlighted findings found that 5.5% of US households owned or leased at least one EV, with California leading the nation at approximately 14%, more than twice the national rate. The 2025 release also introduced nationwide data on household sewage systems, finding that nearly 80% of homes were connected to public sewers, 19.2% used septic systems, and 1.1% relied on other systems.
- 🔗 **The Proposed Census Rule Changes and Their Impacts on Cities:** The National League of Cities (NLC) published an article detailing the potential risks from the 2030 Census residency criteria and data collection could lead to undercounts in university communities, fast-growing cities, and areas with seasonal residents, affecting local planning, federal funding, and congressional apportionment. The proposals would limit who is counted based on citizenship and legal permanent residency, remove questions on race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, and expand the use of administrative records, with public comments due Nov. 2.

National News

- 🔗 **The Urban Institute Releases Brief on Housing and Transportation Coordination:** The Urban Institute argues that Congress should strengthen housing and transportation coordination in the next surface transportation reauthorization by requiring MPOs to integrate housing coordination into short- and long-range plans, funding plan development, and directing USDOT to issue planning guidance. Additional recommendations include linking transportation funding to housing and land-use outcomes and allowing federal transportation funds to support land acquisition near transit, helping expand housing access, improve mobility, and reduce transportation costs and emissions.
- 🔗 **The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) Publishes 2026 Transit Priority Inventory:** NACTO's inaugural Transit Priority Inventory, based on a survey of 72 city transportation departments and transit agencies across the US and Canada, examines transit priority project implementation, staffing, and funding. The inventory finds that bus stop improvements are the leading strategy, transit agencies are more likely than city transportation departments to have dedicated bus priority and BRT programs, and dedicated capital funding is a key factor in improving implementation.

- 🔗 **The Urban Institute to Host Webinar on New Federal Infrastructure Funding Tracker:** On Nov. 9, the Urban Institute will be hosting a webinar to discuss transportation access, transit funding, and where funding is still needed based on their newly published **Federal Infrastructure Funding Tracker**. The event will take place on **Nov. 9 from 2-3:30 pm (ET) and you can register here.**
- 🔗 **The Rise of Illegal E-Motos and the Need for Federal Enforcement:** StreetsBlog USA released an article discussing the growing concerns over crashes that have created confusion around legal e-bikes and illegal e-motos – which has subsequently made reporting more difficult as well. The article argues that federal agencies should strengthen enforcement against illegal e-motos, improve vehicle definitions and crash data collection, and provide more resources and education to address safety concerns without imposing overly broad restrictions on legal e-bikes.
- 🔗 **Seattle Approves Bills to Codify Vision Zero Targets:** The Seattle City Council unanimously approved two of three bills in its SAFER Streets package to strengthen Vision Zero, including requiring city contractors to install truck side guards and empowering the Traffic Engineer, newly designated Chief Safety Officer, to implement quick-build safety improvements after crashes. The third bill would expand daylighting requirements, increase Vision Zero action plan updates from every five years to three, and strengthen traffic safety data reporting to help reduce fatalities and serious injuries.

💲 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**.

Recent Editions

- **October 23** (2026)
- **October 16** (2026)

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- **October 9** (2026)

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