

2019 POLICY BRIEF

SUPPORT COUNTY PRIORITIES IN A SURFACE TRANSPORTATION REAUTHORIZATION BILL

QUICK FACTS

- Owning more roads (46 percent) and bridges (38 percent) than any other government entity, counties play a critical role in our nation's transportation system.
- Counties are directly involved in the operation of 78 percent of the nation's public transit systems.
- Counties rely on a strong federal-state-local partnership to operate and maintain the infrastructure that keeps Americans moving.
- Funding for highway and transit programs expires in September 2020 and any new package must adequately reflect the role counties play in the national transportation network.

ACTION NEEDED:

Urge your Members of Congress to support county priorities as Congress works to reauthorize the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act).

BACKGROUND:

Counties play a critical role in the nation's surface transportation system, owning 46 percent of all public roads (compared to the 32 percent of public roads owned by cities and townships, 19 percent by states, and 3 percent by the federal government) and 38 percent of the National Bridge Inventory. Counties also operate and maintain 78 percent of the nation's transit systems and a third of public airports that connect residents, communities and our national economy.

Following a series of stopgap extensions and the expiration of MAP-21 (P.L. 112-141), President Obama signed the bipartisan FAST Act (P.L. 114-94) in December 2015, representing the first long-term commitment to investing in our nation's surface transportation infrastructure in over a decade. Administered by the U.S. Federal Highway Administration, the FAST Act included \$305 billion over fiscal years 2016 through 2020 for highway development and maintenance, highway and motor vehicle safety, public transportation, motor carrier safety, hazardous materials safety, rail and research, technology and statistics programs.

Among the many provisions of the FAST Act, the five-year authorization bill provided increased funding for locally-owned infrastructure, including protected funding for off-system bridges, approved funding for rural and urban public transportation systems, necessary reforms to MAP-21 to expedite project delivery through streamlined approval process, and direct funding to local decision-makers.

The FAST Act expires September 30, 2020. Consistent federal investment through a new long-term surface transportation reauthorization, developed in consultation with federal, state and local partners, would allow counties to address much-needed infrastructure improvements.

Future surface transportation legislation must preserve local decision-making, direct federal investments to local governments and streamline the regulatory landscape to save money and ensure strong environmental stewardship. Federal funding levels and local authority should adequately reflect the county role in the nation's transportation system. A user-pay approach should continue to be the cornerstone of federal transportation funding, and federal policy should provide counties with the flexibility to use additional financing tools.



Counties urge Congress to include the following county priorities in a surface transportation bill:

- **Establish funding certainty through a long-term surface transportation reauthorization:** Counties rely on the certainty of federal funding to plan and execute both major and minor transportation projects. For counties to confidently commit to critical transportation projects, a reauthorization must deliver consistent funding over several fiscal years.
- **Promote long-term solvency of the Highway Trust Fund:** In order to maintain a robust infrastructure network, the Highway Trust Fund must remain solvent. NACo advocates for an “all tools in the toolbox” approach to accomplishing this, including increased usage of user-fees to support surface transportation infrastructure.
- **Provide direct funding to counties and increase local decision-making authority:** Counties encourage Congress to expand the eligibility pool for direct funding through the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP) to provide communities between 50,000 and 200,000 access to dedicated federal funds. We also support increasing local decision-making authority for STBGP project selection for communities under 50,000.
- **Maintain and increase the set-aside for off-system bridges:** Under current law, counties receive roughly \$777 million annually for off-system bridges. Amending the basis for the set-aside to a more contemporary appropriation level would provide the funding increase needed for counties to safely maintain and operate these structures.
- **Streamline the federal permitting process:** NACo supports a streamlining of the federal permitting process through

concurrent reviews and increased thresholds for categorical exclusions, which can help reduce project delays.

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