



SAFETEA-LU Reauthorization

General Principles for the Federal Surface Transportation Bill

The rewrite of the SAFETEA-LU (P.L. 109-59) federal surface transportation law is occurring at a highly pivotal time for the United States, as we strive to remain at the forefront of the global economy, repair aging infrastructure, and prepare for a growing population. The members of the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) respectfully encourage the Obama Administration and Congress to promote regional strategies and solutions to advance our nation's overall economic development, global competitiveness, transportation infrastructure and systems, and quality of life goals.

Specifically, the association's overarching federal transportation policy goals include:

- ◆ **Develop a modern, sustainable and seamless surface transportation network** that fully integrates and connects the nation's small urban and rural regions with global, metropolitan and neighboring markets.
- ◆ **Provide local elected and appointed officials**, with enhanced leadership and decision-making roles in the statewide and regional/rural transportation planning, program and project prioritization processes, including through the existing system of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and the emerging network of Regional/Rural Transportation Planning Organizations (RPOs).
- ◆ **Update federal transportation planning laws and rules** to provide dedicated funding, work programs and technical support for sub-state, locally controlled, regional transportation planning in small urban and rural regions to complement the MPO system for metropolitan areas. This includes establishing new policy guidelines and incentives for improved collaboration between neighboring metropolitan and rural areas.
- ◆ **Foster better integration and coordination of statewide and regional transportation planning efforts** with local economic development, housing, land use, public transportation, workforce and other related strategies. This should be achieved by tapping into the local government networks and planning expertise of regional development organizations, including those currently serving as RPOs and those who are already managing approximately half of the nation's 382 MPOs.
- ◆ **Increase federal investments in existing and new rural public transportation providers**, with an emphasis on establishing stronger incentives and program flexibility across the full spectrum of federal and state funding agencies for improved regional coordination and integration of public transportation systems in small metropolitan and rural regions.
- ◆ **Continue to promote new solutions to address rural road safety conditions.** As part of the Highway Safety Improvement Program under SAFETEA-LU, the High Risk Rural Roads Program was established to provide funding for construction and operational improvements on rural major or minor collectors or rural local roads. NADO strongly supports the continuation of this program with modifications to improve state and local official collaboration.

NATIONAL TRENDS AND CONDITIONS

Our ability to sustain and modernize the nation’s transportation infrastructure is directly related to our ability to maintain and grow a world-class economy. The mounting pressures and burdens facing our nation’s infrastructure have been clearly documented by numerous national independent review commissions, as well as federal, state and local government stakeholders. For instance:

- ◆ The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 authorized the nation’s interstate highway system. Since that time, the population of the United States has grown from 165 million to over 300 million. It is expected to reach 420 million by 2050.
- ◆ The number of vehicle miles traveled is estimated to jump from three trillion to seven trillion by 2055.
- ◆ Freight demand is expected to grow from 15 billion tons today to 29 billion tons in 2035, according to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), an increase of 89 percent.
- ◆ Almost 34,000 Americans are killed each year and nearly 2.2 million are injured on America’s roadways, according to NHTSA, with nearly 56 percent of highway fatalities occurring on two-lane rural roads. The economic costs of these crashes are nearly \$230 billion each year, according to U.S. DOT.

America’s Small Urban and Rural Transportation System

- Small urban and rural America is now home to 59 million residents in 2,303 non-metropolitan counties, as well as 35 million more residents living in rural settings on the fringes of urban areas.
- There are 4 million miles of public roads in the United States, with 2.9 million of these roadways classified as rural. Only about 980,000 miles of these roads are part of the Federal-aid highway system.
- With over 82 percent of the nation’s communities solely dependent on trucking for the delivery of goods and commodities, a fully integrated and seamless intermodal surface transportation network is essential to the economic competitiveness and quality of life in small town and rural areas.

SMALL URBAN AND RURAL REGIONAL TRENDS AND CONDITIONS

At first glance, the facts above typically result in a mental picture of transportation gridlock, air pollution, roadway crashes and congestion in America’s major metropolitan regions. However, the reality is that small metropolitan and rural communities across the nation are also facing these transportation-related challenges and needs. While the scale may not always be the same, the level of importance and difficulty of finding solutions for businesses, residents and visitors of these communities and regions often are.

- An analysis conducted by The Road Information Project (TRIP) found that **the use of rural roads increased by 27 percent between 1990 and 2002 by all vehicles and by 32 percent for large commercial trucks.**
- **Traffic congestion in small urban and rural America is increasing 11 percent each year**—twice the rate in urban areas. Meanwhile, approximately one-third of rural interstates and other rural arterials are in poor or mediocre condition, and more than one-fifth of all rural bridges are structurally deficient.
- Over 1,200 transit operators provide service in rural areas. **Yet, only approximately 60 percent of all rural counties nationwide have public transportation available, with 28 percent of these counties having very limited service.**
- In 2009, approximately **70 percent** of the trade between the United States and Canada and Mexico was moved by truck, **much of it on rural highways.**

SPECIFIC PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The members of the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) support full and sustainable funding for the nation’s highway, safety, transit, and intermodal needs as part of SAFETEA-LU federal surface transportation act rewrite, including for small urban and rural regions. As Congress and the administration work to reauthorize this essential legislation, we encourage federal policymakers to:

- **ESTABLISH FORMAL FEDERAL RECOGNITION, MODEL WORK PROGRAM AND FUNDING FOR REGIONALLY BASED, LOCALLY CONTROLLED REGIONAL/RURAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS (RPOS).** This includes:
 - ◆ **Strengthen the current requirement for state DOTs to partner with rural local elected and appointed government officials from “consultation” to “cooperation” as defined under federal law and rules.** In recognition of the diverse governance structures, population demographics, and transportation ownership duties across the states, NADO supports affording state DOTs the flexibility to establish RTPO models that meet state and local conditions and needs.
 - ◆ **Provide formal recognition and a definition for *Regional/Rural Transportation Planning Organizations*.** While the roles, functions and membership of MPOs are clearly defined under federal law and rules, the term *Regional/Rural Planning Organization* is used informally and more loosely to reference an entity that provides a forum for local input on transportation issues in non-metropolitan areas. A federal definition and recognition of RTPOs would reinforce the valuable role these entities are increasingly playing in many states.
 - ◆ **Allow the U.S. Department of Transportation to review, comment and approve the rural consultation models being used by state transportation officials.** As highlighted in the February 2007 statewide and metropolitan planning rulemaking by FHWA-FTA, rural local government officials shall be consulted and treated separately from the general public outreach process. However, U.S. DOT is prohibited from reviewing and approving state processes for rural consultation. Approval of the process would ensure a sincere and effective level of collaboration between state and local officials.
 - ◆ **Target federal highway, transit and safety planning resources to enable RTPOs and rural local officials to work regionally** to build the planning, project development and institutional capacity needed to maintain and sustain a multi-modal, seamless transportation network. Currently, states are required to spend up to 2 percent of core federal highway program funds on statewide planning and research (SPR funds), while MPOs collectively receive more than \$400 million each year. Rural officials and their RTPOs must rely on the voluntary sub-allocation of planning funds (including SPR funds) from states, which is estimated to occur in less than 30 states.
- **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING AND LAND USE STRATEGIES AND PLANS ARE TRADITIONALLY A PRIMARY FUNCTION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTED AND APPOINTED OFFICIALS—A TRADITION STRONGLY ENDORSED BY NADO.** As the administration and Congress work to address economic competitiveness concerns, we support stronger federal incentives and program flexibility that promote enhanced intergovernmental collaboration and improved voluntary local government cooperation at the multi-state and sub-state regional levels.

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS
GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR SAFETEA-LU SURFACE TRANSPORTATION REAUTHORIZATION**

As our cities and rural areas grow beyond their traditional parochial boundaries and become increasingly regional, the primary drivers of our nation's economic competitiveness will also become increasingly regional in nature. Developing a transportation network that connects all facets of a region—urban to suburban to rural—in a seamless, user-friendly fashion becomes increasingly critical to ensuring that our domestic economic markets can compete on a global scale.

Issues such as multimodal planning and public transportation, land use and development, freight transportation needs, and economic development are local and regional priorities that should occupy a key concern in the statewide transportation planning process. Rural local officials must play an active role in this process if we are to make effective use of our limited transportation resources.

The formal involvement of rural local elected officials in the statewide transportation planning process would provide a vital link to local economic development and land use activities. This underlying principle also recognizes that state and local officials must work together to coordinate and leverage the investment of public resources. To remain competitive globally, we must make more strategic use of available transportation resources.

- **TARGET FLEXIBLE PROGRAM RESOURCES TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TO ADDRESS RURAL ROAD SAFETY CONDITIONS AND PRIORITIES.** Each year, almost 34,000 Americans are killed and nearly 2.2 million are injured on our nation's roadways. The total economic cost of these crashes exceeds \$230 billion annually. Unfortunately, nearly 56 percent of highway fatalities typically occur on two-lane rural roads. When adjusted for vehicle miles traveled, according to the GAO, some rural roads have a fatality rate over six times greater than urban interstates. These facts are extremely troubling, since only 40 percent of all vehicle miles are traveled on two-lane rural roads. *Therefore, we encourage Congress and the U.S. DOT to ensure that rural local government officials and their RTPOs are given the resources necessary to improve rural safety planning, outreach and roadway improvements, including through modifications to the High-Risk Rural Road set-aside within the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP).*

- **INCREASE FEDERAL INVESTMENTS IN EXISTING AND NEW REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SERVICES.** Public transportation is only available in 60 percent of rural counties, with less than 30 percent of the nearly 1,200 systems offering limited service. While the deployment of more reliable, coordinated and efficient public transportation systems has increased substantially from the early 1990s, there remains a significant unmet need and demand for rural public transportation. *As part of the SAFETEA-LU reauthorization bill, federal policymakers are encouraged to increase federal funding for existing and new rural public transportation providers, while also establishing stronger incentives, guidelines and programs for improved regional coordination, connection and integration of public transportation systems in small metropolitan and rural regions.*

For more information, contact NADO Associate Legislative Director Jennifer Walsh
at 202.624.8467 or jwalsh@nado.org.