



# The National Beat

January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024

## Federal Updates

On January 8<sup>th</sup>, Mitch Landrieu, who played a pivotal role in implementing the IIJA as a senior adviser in the Biden administration, is stepping down from his White House role ([read here](#)). He will join President Biden's reelection campaign as a national co-chair.

On January 7<sup>th</sup>, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Speaker Mike Johnson have secured a \$1.7 trillion funding agreement to prevent a government shutdown, with \$886 billion allocated for defense and \$773 billion for non-defense, slightly increasing military and slightly decreasing non-defense spending ([read here](#)). Despite the deal, risks of a shutdown persist due to unresolved policy debates and tight deadlines, with critical government funding expiring soon. Johnson's negotiations reduced emergency funding and mandatory program funding, but without Congressional action, significant cuts in defense and non-defense spending are imminent, including a potential 9 percent reduction in domestic programs.

On January 7<sup>th</sup>, the new funding deal announced by House Speaker Mike Johnson reopened discussions about a provision in a House bill that seeks to prevent Washington, D.C., from banning right turns at red lights ([read here](#)). Critics of this provision point to Congress prioritizing interference in D.C.'s local matters over their constituents' needs. The broader spending deal, which includes various appropriations, also features measures against automated traffic enforcement and reflects Congress's history of intervening in D.C.'s self-governance, such as attempts to influence local traffic laws and police accountability.

On January 5<sup>th</sup>, the Treasury Department stated that in 2023, electric and plug-in hybrid vehicle sales in the U.S. exceeded 1.4 million, marking a significant increase, particularly in December when 9.8% of vehicles sold were electric. This surge is attributed to new policies, including instant rebates on EV tax credits effective from January 1, which have encouraged quicker adoption. Automakers are adapting to new domestic sourcing rules that reduce the number of models eligible for these credits. The Treasury has processed numerous reports from dealers for instant rebates, and the IRS is actively approving VINs to comply with these new regulations. Over 8,700 car dealers are registered to offer these incentives, and the IRS is expected to finalize VIN processing soon.

On December 18<sup>th</sup>, Senator Joe Manchin announced he is taking legal steps under the Congressional Review Act to challenge the Biden administration's implementation of EV tax credit rules by the Treasury Department ([read here](#)). He has requested the Government Accountability Office to assess if the Treasury's guidance could be considered a "final rule," which would enable Congress to potentially overturn it. Manchin's concerns center on the rules potentially benefiting China and the broad interpretation of domestic sourcing and foreign entities provisions. While these rules are yet to be finalized, with domestic sourcing expected to be completed in April 2024, Manchin argues their current impact warrants treating them as final for the purposes of review.



## USDOT

On January 11<sup>th</sup>, FHWA announced the Charging and Fueling Infrastructure (CFI) Program allocated a total of \$622.57 million in grant funds to 47 recipients ([read here](#)). This initiative is aimed at the strategic deployment of publicly accessible electric vehicle charging stations and alternative fueling infrastructure. These facilities will be conveniently situated in both urban and rural communities, as well as along designated Alternative Fuel Corridors (AFCs). The grant awards span across 22 states and Puerto Rico, and two Tribes.

On January 10<sup>th</sup>, USDOT released a report detailing progress in enhancing the nation's transportation infrastructure ([read here](#)). Key achievements include implementing the IJJA, improving road and vehicle safety, advancing rail safety, and strengthening consumer protections for air travelers.

On January 10<sup>th</sup>, FHWA published a report on Safe System Roadway Design Hierarchy ([read here](#)). The Safe System Approach (SSA) framework is aimed at eliminating traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries. It is structured into 4 tiers that prioritize infrastructure-based countermeasures, ranging from solutions that remove roadway conflicts, to measures providing critical information for safe decision-making by road users. The hierarchy emphasizes that physical system changes are more effective than relying on road users' safe decisions. This introduces the hierarchy and demonstrates how transportation agencies and practitioners can apply it.

On January 8<sup>th</sup>, USDOT announced the winners of Stage 1A of the Intersection Safety Challenge at the 2024 TRB Annual Meeting, selecting 15 teams from a pool of 120 submissions ([read here](#)). These winners, ranging from universities to state departments and private companies, will receive \$100,000 each to further develop their innovative intersection safety solutions in Stage 1B. This initiative, aligned with the U.S. DOT's Vision Zero and National Roadway Safety Strategy, aims to significantly enhance safety at intersections, particularly for vulnerable road users, and reflects the department's commitment to reducing roadway fatalities and injuries.

On December 29<sup>th</sup>, USDOT announced the Transforming Transportation Advisory Committee (TTAC) to advise on transportation innovation strategies ([read here](#)). The committee comprises 27 members. The committee's role is to provide diverse insights to ensure future transportation is safe, efficient, sustainable, equitable, and transformative. Members will serve two-year terms, offering advice on various topics including safe and environmentally friendly technology deployment, cross-modal integration of emerging technologies, policies fostering innovation and workforce development, data sharing for transportation transformation, and cybersecurity solutions in transportation systems. The first TTAC meeting is scheduled for January 18.

On December 21<sup>st</sup>, USDOT announced it allocated nearly \$274 million to 12 projects under the new Rural Surface Transportation Grant Program ([read here](#)). The program responds to the critical condition of rural roads and bridges, and the high fatality rates on rural roads. This funding is part of a broader commitment of \$44 billion to improve rural transportation infrastructure, with more recipients of the MEGA funding are to be announced soon.

On December 20<sup>th</sup>, FHWA opened the Bridge Investment Program, making \$9.7 billion in funding available ([read here](#)). The program is designed to modernize America's bridges, with this specific tranche



focusing on bridge planning, repair, and replacement projects under \$100 million. This initiative is part of a broader commitment of \$40 billion over five years, aiming to maintain critical infrastructure, support local economies, strengthen supply chains, and create jobs. To date, the law has already supported over 7,000 bridge projects. The current funding opportunity includes “Planning” grants for project development activities and “Bridge Project” grants for actual construction and repair works. FHWA prioritizes projects in states that have not received significant funding in previous rounds. In addition to the current funding, the program previously allocated \$2.4 billion in 2022 for 37 bridges across 29 states.

On December 19<sup>th</sup>, FHWA released the 11th edition of the "Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways" (MUTCD), marking its first update since 2009 ([read here](#)). This manual sets national standards for traffic signs, signals, and pavement markings, crucial for the safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, and all road users. The update reflects changes in travel behavior over the last decade and includes new innovations for enhancing travel and safety. It emphasizes pedestrian safety with features like the rectangular rapid-flashing beacon and more visible crosswalk patterns. The update aligns with the USDOT’s National Roadway Safety Strategy towards zero road deaths ([Read AMPO’s summary of the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of MUTCD here](#)).

On December 18<sup>th</sup>, FHWA published a “Trails as Resilient Infrastructure” guidebook to emphasize the importance of trails as a resilient component of transportation infrastructure ([read here](#)). The guidebook highlights the versatility of trails in daily use for commuting and recreation, as well as their critical role in emergency situations and climate change adaptation. It provides insights on designing and planning trails to be sustainable and resilient, offering practical guidance on enhancing their durability and adaptability. The guide also explores how trails can contribute significantly to emergency planning and response, underscoring their value beyond leisure and transport in strengthening community resilience.

### **Congressional Hearings, Meetings, & Markups**

- On [Thursday, January 11th at 10:00 AM](#): The House T&I Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment held a hearing on Proposals for a Water Resources Development Act of 2024: Members’ Day Hearing.
- On [Thursday, January 11th at 10:00 AM](#): The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee held a hearing to examine federal electric vehicle incentives including the federal government’s role in fostering reliable and resilient electric vehicle supply chains.
- On [Wednesday, January 10<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 AM](#): The Senate Budget Committee held a hearing to examine investing in the future, focusing on safeguarding municipal bonds from climate risk.

### **National Transportation News**

On January 3<sup>rd</sup>, TRB published “Critical Issues in Transportation for 2024 and Beyond,” that focuses on 5 key goals: mitigating and responding to climate change, promoting equity and inclusion, increasing road safety, advancing public health, and building a strong, competitive economy ([read here](#)). The report highlights the urgency of these issues in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the shift away from fossil fuels, increasing road fatalities, and the long-standing impacts of racial discrimination and economic disparities.



On December 28<sup>th</sup>, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) has postponed the enforcement of its Advanced Clean Fleets (ACF) rule, which mandates the transition to zero-emission trucks, due to the absence of a required waiver from the EPA ([read here](#)). The ACF rule, aiming to end the sale of combustion-powered trucks by 2035 and transition trucking fleets to zero-emission vehicles by 2042, is on hold until the EPA grants permission or deems the waiver unnecessary. This delay comes amidst legal challenges from the industry, citing the ambitious nature of the rule and current limitations in zero-emission vehicle technology and infrastructure. CARB is encouraging voluntary compliance during this period and is in dialogue with the trucking industry to avoid further legal disputes.

## NOFOs

*Learn about federal grants available to MPOs and key NOFO information in AMPO's NOFO Tracker ([access here](#)). The Tracker is available on [ampo.org](#) under the "Resources" drop down.*

### New

- FHWA's, [Bridge Investment Program \(BIP\), Planning and Bridge Project Grants](#)
  - **Description:** The Bridge Investment Program is a competitive, discretionary program that focuses on existing bridges to reduce the overall number of bridges in poor condition, or in fair condition at risk of falling into poor condition.
  - **Deadline:** 3/19/2024
- USDOT's, [Port Infrastructure Development Program \(PIDP\)](#)
  - **Description:** Funds for FY 2024 PIDP grants will be awarded on a competitive basis to assist in funding eligible projects for the purpose of improving the safety, efficiency, or reliability of the movement of goods through ports and intermodal connections to ports.
  - **Deadline:** 4/30/2024

### Upcoming

- FRA's [Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant Program](#)
  - **Description:** \$573 million will be available as competitive, discretionary funding. The funding is dedicated to highway-rail or pathway-rail grade crossing improvement projects. The primary focus of these projects will be on enhancing the safety and mobility of both people and goods.
  - **Support for Applicants:** FRA plans to conduct a webinar after releasing the NOFO to provide a comprehensive program overview for potential grantees.
- FRA's [Restoration and Enhancement Grant Program](#)
  - **Description:** \$104 million in competitive, discretionary funding will be announced. These funds are allocated for operating assistance grants. They are intended to support the initiation, restoration, or enhancement of intercity passenger rail transportation.
  - **Support for Applicants:** FRA will host a webinar following the NOFO release. This webinar will offer potential grantees an overview of the program, detailing key information needed for the application process and providing insights into the program's goals and expectations.
- FHWA's [Prioritization Process Pilot Program \(PPPP\)](#)



- **Description:** FHWA plans to release a NOFO in mid to late November for the Prioritization Process Pilot Program (PPPP). The program will support data-driven approaches to planning.
  - **\*Expected NOFO next week.**
- Build America Bureau's [Innovative Finance and Asset Concession Assistance Program](#)
  - **Description:** The Build America Bureau has announced a \$38.8 million Innovative Finance and Asset Concession Assistance Program for fiscal years 2022-2023. A NOFO is expected later in 2023.