



The National Beat

November 16th, 2023

Federal Updates

On November 15th, the Senate passed a stopgap spending bill with an 87-11 vote, avoiding a government shutdown before the November 17th deadline ([read here](#)). The House also successfully passed the stopgap spending bill on November 14th in a 336-95 vote. This temporary funding measure was approved after a delay due to discussions on defense policy legislation. It introduces a two-tiered deadline approach, allowing for different parts of the government to be funded until January 19th or February 2nd, aiming to simplify the process and prevent a politically complex funding bundle at once. As the Senate and House prepare for further budget negotiations, there's pressure to reconcile differences and pass the remaining appropriations bills without resorting to another stopgap measure.

On November 15th, the Census Bureau announced its updated the Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES) data product, to include data for 2021 ([read here](#)). This release expands the OnTheMap applications, which now includes employment data from 2002 to 2021 for most states. The new LODES data aims to enhance the accessibility of employment and dynamic data for various uses, including planning and emergency management.

On November 9th, the white House announced it has allocated approximately \$400 billion in the first two years of the \$1.2 trillion IJA, initiating over 40,000 projects across 4,500 communities ([read here](#)). This progress, announced as the law's second anniversary approaches, includes significant investments in road and bridge repairs, port and waterway projects, and airport terminal developments. Additionally, \$614 billion has been invested in private sector manufacturing and clean energy, with a notable expansion in electric vehicle charging infrastructure, increasing the number of charging ports by 700 percent. The White House has also released updated state-by-state fact sheets and a map detailing these projects ([access here](#)).

On November 8th, the White House announced its intention to veto a Republican-led resolution seeking to overturn a rule that temporarily relaxes Buy America requirements for federally funded EV charging stations ([read here](#)). Senator Joe Manchin expressed support for the resolution, emphasizing the importance of bolstering American manufacturing in the EV sector. The resolution, initiated by Senator Marco Rubio, criticizes the waiver for potentially benefiting China amidst the U.S.'s expansion of EV infrastructure. The White House contends that reversing the waiver would harm domestic EV charging manufacturing and investment, a stance echoed by Senate EPW Chair Tom Carper.

On November 7th, the House of Representatives amended the FY 2024 T-HUD appropriations bill but postponed the final vote due to concerns about lacking sufficient Republican support ([read here](#)). The bill faced opposition due to substantial cuts in Amtrak subsidies, a decision rooted in budget reductions agreed upon months earlier. Subcommittee chairman Tom Cole prioritized HUD programs and core Federal Aviation Administration programs, resulting in significant cuts to other USDOT areas, most notably a 56% cut in remaining discretionary funds and severe reductions in RAISE Grants, Amtrak



funding, and other key transportation programs. The bill's future remains uncertain, with no further amendments currently allowed. The House completed action on 74 amendments proposed by the Rules Committee. The postponement puts the House at a disadvantage in negotiations with the Senate, especially given the deep partisan divide in the House and a united Senate Appropriations Committee aligned with the White House on spending totals. These developments come after a June decision by the House Appropriations Committee to adopt significantly lower spending totals for seven of the twelve FY 2024 bills, resulting in a political deadlock.

On November 7th, the Senate EPW T&I Subcommittee held a hearing to discuss roadway safety challenges and potential solutions ([read here](#)). The focus was on truck parking, safety improvements for all road users, including Vision Zero and Complete Streets policies, and other issues like trucking workforce dynamics, speed limiters, and funding methods. The discussion highlighted programs from the IJA, specifically the SS4A grant program. The hearing touched on other roadway safety improvements, debates over government funding levels, and the importance of local empowerment in transportation policy. Additional issues like electrification of trucks, air pollution, and the safety of highway workers were also discussed, revealing a complex web of concerns in the realm of transportation safety and infrastructure.

On November 7th, the Senate Subcommittee on Tourism, Trade and Export Promotion held a hearing on Sustainable Tourism to address the impacts of increased tourism on transportation, especially in outdoor recreation ([read here](#)). The hearing focused on the challenges and opportunities faced by smaller and rural communities near popular tourist destinations and the strain on local infrastructure and resources due to the influx of visitors.

On November 6th, the GAO published a report on Discretionary Transportation Grants and recommendations for improved USDOT application evaluation ([read here](#)). GAO found that in FY 2022, USDOT allocated \$2.25 billion through the RAISE program to 166 transportation projects. The RAISE program required applicants to conduct a benefit-cost analysis, a task found challenging by 69% of the capital grant applicants. Despite DOT's guidance and webinars, a comprehensive review to determine if additional resources needed for applicants was not conducted. GAO noted that DOT's evaluation process for these applications did not fully align with federal guidelines. Key issues included inconsistent application of merit review criteria, insufficient documentation of decisions, non-disclosure of certain selection factors, and lack of specific explanations for not selecting highly rated projects. The GAO recommended improvements to address applicant challenges in developing benefit-cost analyses, ensure more consistent and transparent evaluation processes, and provide more comprehensive documentation and disclosure in the RAISE program's decision-making. DOT agreed with most of the GAO's recommendations, partially concurred with one, and disagreed with another.

USDOT

On November 11th, FHWA announced a new interactive website featuring Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plans and Inventories for State DOTs ([read here](#)). The ADA Transition Plans outline an agency's commitment to making their services and facilities accessible to all, including individuals with disabilities. The new website provides easy access to each State DOT's ADA Transition Plan, its last update, and an inventory of existing barriers.



On November 9th, USDOT updated its Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making guide ([access here](#)). The guide offers a detailed definition of meaningful public involvement, emphasizing proactive community representation, consideration of public feedback, and its integration into transportation projects. The latest update includes an appendix on effectively using federal funds for public involvement activities, providing illustrative examples like hiring community-based organizations, offering amenities at public meetings, and financial incentives for participation.

On November 9th, USDOT published an RFI, inviting comments from the public on ways to improve public transit facilities' accessibility ([access here](#)). Comments will be used to guide potential updates to the ADA standards. Comments are open until January 5th.

On November 6th, the White House announced a \$16.4 billion grant from the FRA for the Northeast Corridor railroad infrastructure ([read here](#)). The grant will be used to enhance Amtrak passenger train speeds and volumes, with projects spanning from Boston to Washington. It's the first portion of an astounding \$36 billion allocated by IIJA for the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail program, with a cap of \$24 billion for the Northeast Corridor projects. The grant will fund various major projects, including replacing the 150-year-old Baltimore NEC tunnel, constructing a new Hudson River Tunnel, repairing existing tunnels, replacing the old Susquehanna River rail bridge, and more. This announcement also refers to future funding for other significant projects and represents a substantial investment in rail infrastructure.

On November 4th, Transportation Secretary Buttigieg pledged \$3.4 billion to extend NYC's Second Avenue Subway by 1.76 miles to East Harlem ([read here](#)). This Full Funding Grant Agreement, while not legally binding, has historically been honored by Congress. To date, \$450 million has been allocated, with future appropriations planned through 2032. The project, expected to be operational by September 30, 2032, will significantly enhance local transportation, offering frequent services and catering to over 100,000 daily trips. The federal funds will cover 44.2% of the project's \$7.7 billion cost, which is notably higher per mile than similar projects globally, largely due to the exceptional cost of station construction.

On November 3rd, FTA announced an investment of over \$653 million in 41 port improvement projects nationwide under the Port Infrastructure Development Program (PIDP) ([read here](#)). This initiative to enhance the capacity and efficiency of various types of ports including coastal seaports, Great Lakes ports, and inland river ports. These projects are intended to strengthen American supply chains, create workforce development opportunities, and improve the safety, reliability, and resilience of ports. This funding is part of the largest dedicated investment in ports and waterways in U.S. history, nearly \$17 billion through the IIJA. Selected projects include dock infrastructure replacement, transportation system improvements, berth reconstruction, wharf improvements, terminal expansions, and development of new facilities, all contributing to enhanced efficiency, safety, and resilience of U.S. ports.



Congressional Hearings, Meetings, & Markups

- On [Tuesday, November 14th at 10:00 AM](#): The House T&I Subcommittee Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation held a hearing on Coast Guard drug interdiction, immigration, and fishing enforcement.
- On [Tuesday, November 7th at 10:00 AM](#): The Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Subcommittee on Tourism, Trade, and Export Promotion held a hearing on sustainable tourism.
- On [Tuesday, November 7th at 10:00 AM](#): The Senate EPW Subcommittee on T&I held a hearing on roadway safety.

National Transportation News

On November 13th, POLITICO reported that, FEMA’s three-year-old Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, designed to build climate-resilient infrastructure, has revealed disparities in federal funding distribution, often leaving lower-income states behind ([read here](#)). Five large states, including California, Florida, New York, North Carolina, and Washington, have collectively received half of the BRIC funding, totaling \$2 billion since 2021. In contrast, 24 smaller states have received less than 5% of the funding. Several smaller states like Mississippi and West Virginia have not claimed millions of dollars earmarked for them, with some states lacking the resources or personnel to apply for these grants. BRIC's competitive nature often favors larger, more affluent areas capable of submitting detailed applications. FEMA is attempting to address this imbalance by aiding disadvantaged communities and tribal nations with climate-risk assessments and planning, but the challenge remains to elevate the capacity of smaller states to access and manage federal funds effectively for climate resilience projects.

This week, the AAA Foundation for Traffic safety published a report on the Safe System approach to road safety, aiming to eliminate crash deaths by transforming the transportation system, including infrastructure, vehicles, and user behavior ([read here](#)). Their report provides recommendations for communities on promoting Safe System principles and policies, serving as a guide for transportation stakeholders to communicate the approach's benefits effectively.

On November 7th, 2023 off-year elections took place. Many ballots had a significant focus on transportation-related measures. Approximately 70 ballot measures were tracked, with nearly half in the Western region. These measures predominantly targeted road infrastructure, alongside some addressing public transit, school transportation, aviation, and rail ([read here](#)). Many sought to fund transportation projects through bonds or new/expanded taxes for capital improvements, maintenance, or expanded services. In Ohio, the Cincinnati Southern Railway was sold to Norfolk Southern for \$1.6 billion, marking the end of its municipal ownership, a unique case in the US ([read here](#)). In Texas, Houston voters approved a proposition impacting the selection process for city council or metropolitan planning organization members, emphasizing proportional representation ([read here](#)). In Georgia, DeKalb and Floyd counties passed Special Purpose Local Option Sales Taxes for capital improvements and road maintenance ([read here](#)).

On November 1st, the Urban Institute released a report titled, “Surmounting the Fiscal Cliff,” addresses the financial challenges faced by US public transportation providers in the wake of COVID-19 ([read here](#)). The pandemic significantly reduced ridership, impacting fare revenues and leading to a fiscal cliff



as federal aid ends. The report highlights the unstable funding patterns for transit compared to other public services. Transit agencies heavily reliant on passenger fares and unstable sales taxes face financial instability, contributing to a cycle of service cuts and declining ridership, which in turn increases road traffic and greenhouse gas emissions. The report suggests solutions like diversifying funding sources, leveraging highway funds for transit, and improving operational efficiency.

NOFOs

New

- FHWA's [Saving Lives with Connectivity: Accelerating V2X Deployment](#)
 - **Description:** This initiative, backed by a \$40 million funding pool, is aimed at advancing connected and interoperable vehicle technologies. The primary focus of the program is to enhance road safety, mobility, and efficiency through Vehicle-to-Everything (V2X) technology. V2X technology facilitates communication between vehicles, wireless devices, and roadside infrastructure, offering crucial warnings and improving situational awareness for drivers.
 - **Eligibility:** non-Federal domestic public sector organizations, domestic academic institutions, and private sector/other entities incorporated in the United States.
 - **Deadline:** January 17, 2024
- FHWA's [Tribal Transportation Program](#) (UPDATE)
 - **Description:** FHWA made a significant update to the SS4A Program, particularly benefiting Native American and Alaska Native communities. The revision allows the use of Tribal Transportation Program (TTP) funds to fulfill the 20% non-federal match requirement for the SS4A program. This change enables the utilization of grant awards from the Tribal Transportation Program Safety Fund (TTPSF) to either match existing SS4A grant awards or fund distinct components of a larger project proposed for SS4A funding.
 - **Deadline:** January 15, 2024.
 - **Eligibility:** "federally recognized Indian Tribes identified on the list of "Indian Entities Recognized and Eligible to Receive Services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs" (published at 86 FR 18552 or future updates). Other entities may partner with a Tribal government to submit an application, but the eligible applicant must be a federally recognized Indian Tribe."

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!**
- FHWA's [Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program \(ATIIP\)](#)
 - **Description:** FHWA plans to release a NOFO later in 2023 for a new initiative, the Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program (ATIIP). ATIIP will fund projects to establish or extend active transportation networks and will offer two types of grants: Planning and Design, and Construction. Approximately \$45 million is allocated for ATIIP in FY23.
- 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.

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.