



# The National Beat

November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023

## Federal Updates

Congress will face challenges in January 2024, in part due to House Speaker Mike Johnson's refusal to support a "clean"<sup>1</sup> funding bill. This decision, coupled with continuing disagreements over spending levels between the House and Senate and ongoing divisions within the GOP, raises the likelihood of a government shutdown, with critical deadlines on January 19<sup>th</sup> and February 2<sup>nd</sup>.

As the January 19<sup>th</sup> deadline approaches, the House and Senate face significant challenges in reconciling their Transportation-HUD (THUD) appropriations bills for FY 2024 (read Senate bill [here](#), House bill [here](#)). The two bills are \$22.9 billion apart in their budget allocations (i.e., a 35% difference). However, the actual gap is \$8.4 billion (i.e., 9%), as both chambers have used accounting methods to reduce their net totals. The House and Senate bills make similar decisions regarding HUD housing rental programs and FAA Operations, accounting for over 60% of the gross discretionary funding. Despite these similarities, there are major differences, particularly in earmarked projects and funding for other USDOT and HUD programs. The House bill makes significant cuts in several large USDOT grant programs (e.g., RAISE, CRISI, Transit CIG grants, etc.) to fit its smaller budget, leading to only a \$235 million difference in remaining USDOT funds compared to the Senate bill. Reconciling these differences, particularly with the unique earmarked projects in each bill, may be a complex and time-consuming process.

On November 27<sup>th</sup>, President Joe Biden inaugurated the first meeting of a new supply chain resilience council (cabinet-level) to address ongoing economic challenges and high prices in the US ([read here](#)). He announced 30 initiatives to enhance supply chain efficiency. These measures are part of Biden's broader strategy to tackle inflation. The council aims to strengthen domestic manufacturing and enhance federal monitoring of supply chains. This initiative follows previous efforts to mitigate supply chain problems that contributed to inflation during the pandemic recovery, an issue significantly impacting the transportation industry among others. The creation of this council could signal potential enhancements in transportation infrastructure and regulatory changes that could impact pricing and service transparency across the industry.

## USDOT

On November 27<sup>th</sup>, Secretary Buttigieg announced the creation of the Office of Multimodal Freight Infrastructure and Policy (Multimodal Freight Office) after the first meeting of the White House Council on Supply Chain Resilience ([read here](#)). This new office, part of USDOT, will oversee the nation's freight

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<sup>1</sup> *Note:* a "clean" funding bill is a piece of legislation that deals solely with the allocation of funds for government operations, without any additional policy provisions/amendments. Clean bills usually extend current funding levels and do not include any new/controversial policy measures. This approach is often used to pass necessary funding to avoid government shutdowns or to maintain government operations while more comprehensive budget negotiations continue.



network and supply chains, and advance the DOT's Freight Logistics Optimization Works (FLOW) program. FLOW includes major US ports, ocean carriers, and retailers, aims to enhance the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the supply chain.

On November 27<sup>th</sup>, the FRA released new resources for rural and federally recognized Indian Tribe grantees as part of the USDOT's Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success (ROUTES) Initiative ([access here](#)). The FRA's updated webpage features the Justice40 Rail Explorer, a mapping tool to analyze rail infrastructure and potential improvements in relation to surrounding communities. The site page also offers a Discretionary Grants Dashboard, providing an overview of grant opportunities with specific benefits for rural areas, such as rural set-asides or match waivers. The updated Rural Grant Applicant Toolkit guides applicants through the process of securing discretionary grants for rural transportation projects, with a detailed overview of federal grant processes and resources to enhance award success. Other DOT tools include a funding opportunity calendar, resources to identify Federal disadvantaged community areas, and programs offering non-Federal match flexibility.

On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, FHWA finalized a rule requiring state DOTs and MPOs to measure and set targets for reducing transportation-related Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions ([read here](#)). This rule emphasizes flexibility, allowing states to define their own goals without penalties for failing to meet them. FHWA Administrator Shailen Bhatt highlighted the lack of penalties, while DOT Secretary Pete Buttigieg pointed out the availability of \$27 billion in federal aid to support states in achieving climate targets. The rule has faced criticism from Republicans that view it as federal overreach and misaligned with the IJIA. Additionally, concerns have been raised within the transportation industry about the feasibility and management of the proposed GHG performance metric. AMPO has provided a high-level summary of the rule and an analysis of how the rule addressed our initial comments on the 2022 NPRM ([read here](#)).

On November 20<sup>th</sup>, USDOT announced it awarded \$3.4 million in grants through the new Rural and Tribal Assistance Pilot Program (RTA), as a part of the ROUTES initiative ([read here](#)). These grants support early-stage development of transportation solutions in rural and Tribal areas. The grants will fund various activities like feasibility studies, design, environmental reviews, and financial analyses, and no local match is required. The program received 406 applications requesting over \$127 million.

On November 17<sup>th</sup>, FTA's National Transit Database released data on 2022 transit farebox revenues and found that across the US, revenue was still 44% below the pre-COVID levels of 2019 ([read here](#)). The total fares collected in 2022 amounted to \$8.94 billion, a significant decrease from the \$16.07 billion in 2019. This decline in farebox revenues is largely due to the failure of mass transit ridership to return to pre-COVID levels, posing financial challenges for many transit providers. The report highlights modal differences and a notable regional disparity. The report also notes that while bus transit receipts were down nationwide, they were less impacted in NYC, and Los Angeles Metro's bus fares were significantly lower partly due to a free ride experiment.

On November 15<sup>th</sup>, FHWA released a technical report on the Safe Systems Approach for the Urban Core ([read here](#)). The Safe System Approach is a to eliminate traffic-related deaths and serious injuries. The report discusses various principles and strategies that can be implemented in urban areas to create safer road environments, including designing streets for all users, managing vehicle speeds, and integrating technology and data-driven solutions. The report focuses on implementing the Safe System Approach on local roads and urban arterials within the existing right-of-way through roadway reconfigurations.



Equitable application of the Safe System Approach is emphasized to address issues of historically underserved communities. The report provides checklists to guide practitioners in applying the Safe System Approach at policy, program, and project levels. The report also includes 10 case studies showcasing successful uses of the Safe System Approach.

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

- On [Thursday, November 30th at 10:00 AM](#): The House T&I Subcommittee on Aviation held a hearing on the consequences of delaying a long-term FAA reauthorization bill.
- On [Wednesday, November 29th at 10:00 AM](#): The Senate EPW Committee held a hearing on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project partnership agreements for WRDA 2024 stakeholder feedback.
- On [Wednesday, November 29th at 10:00 AM](#): The House T&I Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials held a hearing on navigating the future of intercity passenger rail.

### **National Transportation News**

On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, a vehicle explosion at the Rainbow Bridge in Niagara Falls caused major disruptions in US-Canada travel flows ([read here](#)). The explosion occurred during a peak travel period for the Thanksgiving holiday, resulted in heightened security along the border and raised concerns among high-level officials in both countries. The incident led to the temporary closure of the Buffalo-Niagara International Airport to international flights and the suspension of Amtrak service between New York and Canada. While the cause of the explosion remains unclear, US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas indicated there was no sign of terrorism. The incident caused two fatalities and minor injuries to a U.S. customs officer.

On November 20<sup>th</sup>, the United Auto Workers (UAW) union successfully ratified new contracts with Detroit's Big Three automakers—General Motors, Ford, and Stellantis ([read here](#)). About 64% of UAW members voted in favor of the tentative agreements, which were negotiated last month. These contracts include substantial pay raises, cost-of-living adjustments, improved terms for temporary workers, and the right to strike over potential future plant closures. The UAW intends to leverage these contract victories to boost organizing efforts at non-union auto manufacturers in the U.S. The ratification of these contracts marks a significant milestone for the UAW, as they plan to revitalize the union's presence in the auto industry, especially in regions affected by right-to-work laws. The companies are now focused on resuming full operations and managing the increased labor costs from the new agreements.



## NOFOs

### New

- FRA's [Innovative Coordinated Access & Mobility Grants](#)
  - **Description:** Access and Mobility Partnership Grants seek to improve access to public transportation by building partnerships among health, transportation, and other service providers. This program provides competitive funding to support innovative projects for the transportation disadvantaged that will improve the coordination of transportation services and non-emergency medical transportation services.
  - **Eligibility:** "Eligible applicants are entities eligible as direct or designated recipients under the Section 5310 program, including: State departments of transportation, designated recipients for Section 5310 funds, or local governmental entities that operate a public transportation service, or their eligible subrecipients that have the authority and technical capacity to implement a regional or statewide cost allocation pilot..."
  - **Deadline:** 2/2/2024
- FTA's [Innovative Coordinated Access & Mobility Grants](#)
  - **Description:** Access and Mobility Partnership Grants seek to improve access to public transportation by building partnerships among health, transportation, and other service providers. This program provides competitive funding to support innovative projects for the transportation disadvantaged that will improve the coordination of transportation services and non-emergency medical transportation services.
  - **Eligibility:** "Eligible applicants are State departments of transportation, designated recipients for Section 5310 funds, or local governmental entities that operate a public transportation service, or their eligible subrecipients that have the authority and technical capacity to implement a regional or statewide cost allocation pilot. Private entities that provide shared-ride on-demand service to the public on a regular basis are operators of public transportation and are therefore eligible subrecipients. Organizations that do not operate public transportation are not eligible applicants."
  - **Deadline:** 2/13/2024
- FHWA's [Advanced Transportation Technology and Innovation \(ATTAIN\) Program](#)
  - **Description:** \*Cooperative Agreements or Allocations to State DOTs; program to deploy advanced transportation technologies aimed at enhancing safety, efficiency, and system performance, with expected benefits including reduced fatalities, congestion, emissions, and improved multimodal system performance and public access to transportation information. The program's focus is on fostering innovative solutions to improve overall transportation infrastructure and user experience, while also collecting valuable data for future policy and infrastructure development.
  - **Eligibility:** "Eligible applicants are State or local governments, transit agencies, **metropolitan planning organizations (MPO)**, or other political subdivisions of a State or local government (such as publicly owned toll or port authorities), or a multijurisdictional group or consortia of research institutions or academic institutions. Partnership with the private sector or public agencies, including multimodal and multijurisdictional entities, research institutions, organizations representing transportation and technology leaders, or other transportation stakeholders, and as



discussed in Section D.2 of this NOFO, applicants are required to include a partnership plan in the technical application.”

- **Deadline:** 2/14/2024

## 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!**
- 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.*