



The National Beat

March 7th, 2024

Federal Updates

On March 7th, the House T&I Committee held a hearing to discuss the IIJA Transportation Grants ([watch here](#)). The Committee discussed issues and opportunities related to applying for and securing discretionary grants administered by USDOT. Amy O'Leary, the Executive Director of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) was a witness for the hearing.

On March 7th, the House Oversight and Accountability Committee held a meeting to vote on legislation aiming to overturn Washington, D.C.'s electric vehicle mandate, citing concerns over cost and consumer choice ([watch here](#)). The "D.C. Consumer Vehicle Choice Protection Act," seeks to block the adoption of California's stringent tailpipe pollution standards.

On March 4th, Congress released legislative developments specifically related to transportation funding, as outlined in the newly unveiled bill text for FY 2024 ([read bill here](#)) ([read THUD bill summary here](#)). The six-bill package also includes tables with earmarks for community project funding ([read here](#)). The bill allocates a total of \$103 billion for transportation initiatives. This includes more than \$79 billion accessible through the Highway Trust Fund. The USDOT is set to receive \$106.4 billion in total budgetary resources. This represents a slight increase of \$15.5 million above current levels. The bill allocates \$345 million for the RAISE Grant program, which, when combined with the \$1.5 billion from the IIJA advanced appropriations, totals \$1.8 billion for FY 2024. The bill provides \$62.9 billion for federal-aid highways, aligning with the IIJA-authorized spending levels. This includes funding for a new bridge program, the Tribal Transportation Program, and other infrastructure programs. A total of \$2.97 billion is allocated for the Federal Railroad Administration, with significant funding dedicated to Amtrak and rail safety improvements, particularly in response to recent safety concerns. The bill provides \$16.6 billion for the FTA, supporting capital investment grants and other initiatives.

On March 1st, the House T&I Committee requested assistance from the House Budget Committee to expedite the allocation of the \$17.1 billion designated for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers under the IIJA, specifically targeting the \$11.6 billion for construction ([read here](#)). This request aims to adjust the spending timeline to ensure funds are used efficiently to avoid constraints tied to the standard ten-year scoring window used in federal budgeting. The T&I Committee's move seeks to facilitate faster spending on authorized water projects, potentially impacting the budgetary scoring of the upcoming WRDA avoiding budgetary points of order against it.

On February 29th Congress voted to extend the deadlines for FY 2024 appropriations authority expiration from March 1st and March 9th, to the new deadline of March 8th and 22nd ([read here](#)). Under the new joint spending agreement, the final text of six of the twelve annual appropriations bills, including the THUD bill, is expected to be released this week. These bills are then anticipated to be passed by both the House and Senate prior to the new deadline of March 8. The remaining six bills are scheduled to be finalized by the subsequent deadline of March 22nd.



On February 29th, the House T&I Committee approved its fiscal year 2025 budget views and estimates ([read here](#)). Chairman Sam Graves highlighted the Committee's past achievements and outlined future priorities, including drafting the next Water Resources Development Act and preparing for the upcoming transportation bill.

On February 28th, the Senate EPW Committee held discussions on the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2024 ([read here](#)). The hearing focused on projects and priorities for water infrastructure managed by the United States Army Corps of Engineers. The hearing highlighted challenges in implementing past WRDA provisions and emphasized the importance of maintaining and modernizing critical infrastructure to mitigate climate change impacts and support economic growth.

USDOT

On February 29th, FTA announced the availability of \$9.9 billion in federal funding to support public transportation across the US ([read here](#)). This funding is allocated to states, urbanized areas, and tribal governments based on statutory formulas, representing partial-year federal support for transit. The FY 2024 apportionments have been updated to reflect new urbanized area boundaries and population figures from the Census Bureau (i.e., released in December 2022). The FTA has utilized the most recent service numbers reported to the National Transit Database for calculating apportionments (i.e., a shift from the COVID-19 pandemic approach, where 2019 data or the most recent year reported was used due to ridership impacts).

On February 22nd, FHWA announced applications are open for the Prioritization Process Pilot Discretionary Grant Program (PPPP), covering Fiscal Years 2022-2024 ([read here](#)). MPOs serving populations over 200,000 are eligible to apply. The available funding amounts to up to \$2 million per award, with a total of up to \$10 million allocated each fiscal year from 2022 to 2026. Applications are due by May 1st, 2024 ([access here](#)).

On February 21st, FTA announced it has allocated nearly 89% of the \$1.5 billion provided by the IIJA for the Rail Vehicle Replacement Program (RVRP) ([read here](#)). In the latest round of funding, \$631 million was distributed to replace 302 railcars, contributing to a total of 770 railcars targeted for replacement across various metropolitan areas. This significant commitment of funds in the program's initial phases leaves only \$166 million remaining for future allocations, marking a rapid deployment of the allocated IIJA resources towards modernizing public transit infrastructure.

Recently, the FRA noted it is evaluating the potential revival of previously discontinued Amtrak long-distance routes (i.e., mandated by the IIJA), focusing on routes that were either discontinued or reduced to non-daily service before the law's enactment ([read here](#)). This study, still in its draft phase, explores the restoration of these routes without initial consideration of funding, but will eventually identify necessary federal and non-federal funding sources for restoration or enhancement. The initiative reflects a significant shift from past efforts aimed at reducing Amtrak's financial losses by cutting long-distance services.

Congressional Hearings, Meetings, & Markups

- On March 7th, the House T&I Subcommittee on Highways and Transit held a hearing to discuss the IIJA Transportation Grants ([watch here](#)).



- On March 6th the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee held a hearing on the status of NTSB investigative reports ([watch here](#)).
- On March 6th, the House T&I subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation held a hearing on Coast Guard labor shortages ([watch here](#)).

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 [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.
 - **Deadline:** May 1, 2024.
- USDOT, [Safe Streets and Roads for All \(SS4A\)](#)
 - **Description:** to support communities in planning and implementing projects to reduce traffic-related deaths and serious injuries. Planning and demonstration grants encompass the development of comprehensive safety action plans, including supplemental safety planning, and/or safety demonstration activities that inform an Action Plan. Implementation grants support strategies or projects that are consistent with an existing Action Plan and may also bundle funding requests for supplemental planning and demonstration activities that inform an Action Plan.
 - **Implementation grant deadline:** May 16, 2024.
 - **Varying deadlines for Planning and demonstration grants:** April 4th, May 16th, and August 29th.
- FHWA's [Congestion Relief Program](#)
 - **Description:** provides discretionary grants aimed at reducing highway congestion and the associated economic and environmental costs in highly congested metropolitan areas in the US with populations exceeding 1,000,000. The program supports innovative, integrated, and multimodal solutions to enhance highway and transit system efficiency. Priority is given to projects that improve intermodal integration, shift travel to non-peak times or non-highway modes and implement pricing strategies for roadways and parking. A focus on projects that promote equity, safety, reduced emissions, and consider the impacts on low-income drivers are emphasized.
 - **Deadline:** April 22, 2024
- FHWA's, [Community Pairing Program](#)
 - **Description:** Program aimed at fostering collaboration among Vision Zero communities. This program offers a platform for sharing best practices, strategies, and forming long-term partnerships to combat traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries. The program starts in Spring 2024.
 - **Deadline:** 3/15/2024



- FTA's, [Low or No Emission Grant Program and the Grants for Buses and Bus Facilities Competitive Program](#)
 - **Description:** The Low or No Emission competitive program provides funding to state and local governmental authorities for the purchase or lease of zero-emission and low-emission transit buses as well as acquisition, construction, and leasing of required supporting facilities.
 - **Deadline:** 4/25/2024

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.
- 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.