



The National Beat

April 18th, 2024

Federal Updates

On April 16th, The House T&I Committee held a roundtable on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Transportation ([read here](#)). The main objective of the discussion was to explore real-world AI applications in transportation, assess its economic impacts, and consider the security risks involved. This dialogue aimed to establish an understanding of AI for Congress members in anticipation of reauthorization. The roundtable featured industry stakeholders leading in real world applications of AI in the transportation sector, including Laura Chace from ITS America. The roundtable highlighted the transformative role of AI in the transportation industry, which includes enhancing traffic management, supply chain efficiencies, expediting infrastructure projects, promoting road safety, and supporting the workforce. Committee members emphasized the importance of avoiding overregulation while considering necessary guidelines to ensure safe and effective application of AI technology.

On April 15th, The Department of Treasury reported on the IRA's point-of-sale rebate for EVs ([read here](#)). The department found that since January, there has been a significant uptake, with about 90% of eligible EV buyers opting to claim their federal tax credit instantly at dealerships. This new provision, which allows dealers to deduct up to \$7,500 from the car's price or offer it as a cash rebate with quick reimbursement from the government, has led to more than \$580 million in reimbursements to dealers for over 100,000 claims.

On April 11th, following the resignation of the House Appropriations Committee chairman Kay Granger triggered a reshuffling within the House committees ([read here](#)). Representative Tom Cole became the new chairman of the full Appropriations Committee and announced the earmark request process for FY 2025 ([read here](#)). This made Representative Steve Womack the new THUD Subcommittee chair (i.e., relinquishing his role at the Financial Services and General Government subcommittee, which was then assumed by Representative Dave Joyce). This sequence of leadership changes also affected other committee positions, causing shifts in House Committee dynamics.

On April 11th, the EPA released its annual Inventory of US GHG emissions and sinks ([read here](#)). The report showed that net emissions for 2022 were 5,489 million metric tons of CO2 equivalent, marking a 1.3% increase from 2021. This increase is attributed to higher energy use driven by the economic rebound post-COVID-19. However, emissions have seen a 17% reduction since 2005 due to factors like energy efficiency improvements and changes in the carbon intensity of fuel choices.

On April 10th, The Senate recently passed a Congressional Review Act resolution (S.J. Res. 61), to nullify the FHWA rule that requires state DOTs and MPOs to account for and set targets to reduce GHG emissions from the NHS ([read here](#)). Despite passing the Senate with a 53-47 vote, President Biden has pledged to veto the resolution should it pass the House. The White House argues that the regulation is a key tool for managing transportation-related emissions and guiding investments, even though two federal judges have recently ruled the rule as an overreach of the FHWA.



On April 10th, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation held a hearing to discuss the renominations of NTSB Chair Jennifer Homendy and STB member Patrick Fuchs ([read here](#)). The hearing questions focused on the response to the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse, transparency, consumer protection, and aircraft safety concerns.

On April 10th, the Bureau of Labor Statistics released its March inflation report ([read here](#)). The report shows a slight increase in the Consumer Price Index of 0.378% between February until March (i.e., an annual rate of over 4.5%--above the Federal Reserve's 2% target). A factor contributing to persistent inflation is the cost associated with owning and operating a car, particularly auto insurance, which saw a significant month-to-month increase of 2.7%. This situation continues to challenge the Federal Reserve's ability to reduce interest rates.

On April 4th, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) released the final Uniform Grants Guidance ([read here](#)). This development aims to streamline the federal grants process and enhance the management of federal funds at the local and regional level. The guidance introduces a unified set of rules and regulations for federal grants, ensuring consistency in language and procedures across Congress, federal agencies, and grant applicants. This initiative is a direct response to the challenges faced by MPOs and local governments in managing federal grant compliance, particularly considering the IJA and new grant opportunities.

USDOT

On April 17th, FTA announced a NOFO under three key programs for the FY 2024 ([read here](#)). Projects funded will enhance existing passenger ferry services, establish new services, and modernize ferry boats, terminals, and facilities. The FTA aims to fund projects under the Passenger and Rural Ferry Programs that minimize greenhouse gas emissions, incorporate climate resilience, reduce lifecycle emissions from project materials, prevent environmental damage, and mitigate transportation's negative impacts on disadvantaged communities. A total of \$316 million has been allocated across these programs to enhance ferry service operations and infrastructure: Passenger Ferry Grant Program (\$51 million), Electric or Low-Emitting Ferry Pilot Program (\$49 million), and the Ferry Service for Rural Communities Program (\$216 million).

On April 16th, USDOT announced an update to the 2024 Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) NOFO ([read here](#)). These changes aim to enhance the availability and flexibility of funding for projects committed to improving roadway safety. Amendments to SS4A FY24 NOFO include an increase in total funding from \$580 million to \$780 million, flexibility in submissions post-deadline with the introduction of remaining funds being distributed on a first-come, first-served basis, a waiver of up to \$200,000 in non-Federal match for applications from certain areas, and more.

On April 16th, USDOT launched the Modernizing NEPA Challenge, with a total of \$750,000 in prize money available to innovators who can advance the accessibility and efficiency of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes ([announcement here](#)). The Challenge will award 15 individual prizes of \$50,000 each, and awardees will be invited to present their solutions at a Modernizing NEPA Showcase webinar with DOT leadership in late 2024 ([read here](#)). Applications are due by July 15th, at 5:00 PM.

On April 15th, USDOT announced the allocation of \$23.6 million to aid 112 communities, including several MPOs, across the US through the Thriving Communities Program ([read here](#)). This program aims



to improve access and utilize federal resources from the IJA to deliver infrastructure projects. The program's second cohort includes three national and six regional capacity builders who will offer two years of intensive, no-cost technical assistance to support under-resourced communities in achieving their local development goals related to economic growth, health, environment, mobility, and access.

On April 15th, NHTSA published a NPRM to enhance EV safety standards by incorporating Global Technical Regulation No. 20 ([read here](#)). This regulation replaces the existing FMVSS No. 305 and will expand its scope to include both light and heavy vehicles to include new performance and risk mitigation requirements for propulsion batteries. The compliance date for this new rule is proposed to be two years after the final rule's publication. Comments on are open until June 14, 2024.

On April 12th, USDOT published an RFI seeking feedback on the best strategies for identifying essential freight facilities and corridors for the National Multimodal Freight Network (NMFN) ([read here](#)). The USDOT is collecting input on goals, criteria, thresholds, and measurable data sources for the NMFN's designation, which will be considered in drafting a proposed network map scheduled for public review in late spring 2024. Comments are due by June 11th, 2024.

On April 11th, USDOT announced the award of \$829.6 million in PROTECT resiliency grants ([read here](#)). PROTECT grants aim to enhance infrastructure resilience against natural disasters and extreme weather events. Among the grants, there were several large construction grants over \$20 million, with a focus on improving crucial infrastructure such as bridges, stormwater systems, and highway resilience, benefiting both urban and rural areas. There were also several MPOs awarded planning grants to improve transportation resilience and protect communities from future impacts ([view awards here](#)).

On April 9th, the FTA finalized updates to the Public Transportation Agency Safety Plans regulation and revised the National Public Transportation Safety Plan to enhance safety for transit workers and passengers ([read here](#)). These updates focus on increasing frontline worker involvement in safety decisions, utilizing data to manage risks, and implementing safety measures such as de-escalation training and assault prevention. Additionally, new safety performance targets are required, and the regulations now mandate that transit agencies form safety committees with equal representation from management and frontline workers to facilitate these improvements.

On April 3rd, the FTA announced the allocation of \$20.5 billion in federal funding for public transit systems across the nation ([read here](#)). The funding aims to support the expansion, modernization, operation, and maintenance of public transportation systems. This includes upgrades to stations, tracks, and maintenance facilities, planning and designing new transit corridors, and improving accessibility for seniors and riders with disabilities. The FY 2024 full-year funding is outlined in apportionment tables, which detail the distribution of funds to states, urbanized areas, and tribal governments ([view here](#)).

Congressional Hearings, Meetings, & Markups

- On April 17th, the House T&I Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials held a hearing on challenges and opportunities in passenger rail services ([watch here](#)).
- On April 16th, The House T&I Committee held a roundtable on Artificial Intelligence in Transportation ([watch here](#)).



- On April 10th, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation held a hearing to discuss the renominations of NTSB Chair Jennifer Homendy and STB member Patrick Fuchs ([watch here](#)).
- On April 5th, the House T&I Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee held a hearing on Port Safety, Security, and Infrastructure Investment ([watch here](#)).

National Transportation News

On April 11th, Members of the Maryland Congressional delegation introduced a bill to authorize the replacement of the Francis Scott Key bridge, which was recently damaged by a collision with a container ship ([read here](#)). The proposed legislation ([read here](#)) would set the federal share for emergency relief funds at 100 percent for the bridge's reconstruction but does not specify a financial ceiling for federal appropriations, unlike similar legislation following the I-35W bridge collapse in 2007 which allocated a specific sum. The bill also includes provisions on using any recovered insurance proceeds to offset the cost of repairs, potentially impacting the funding process pending the resolution of associated insurance claims.

On April 9th, The National Academies Released the “Transformational Technologies and Mobility Inclusion Playbook”, which surrounds changes in technology that provide opportunities and risks for mobility and equity ([read here](#)).

Bloomberg City Network recently reported on how city leaders have effectively used federal funding opportunities to improve local infrastructure ([read here](#)). Cities have successfully secured federal infrastructure grants by employing several key strategies: leveraging partnerships with local entities to enhance grant application capacity, utilizing compelling community-specific narratives to align with federal funding goals, and collaborating regionally to amplify the impact of projects.

Coastal metropolitan areas like Silicon Valley and New York City rank the best in terms of reducing GHG emissions, largely due to their robust transit options and lower VMT ([read here](#)). The 2024 US Transportation Climate Impact Index, which evaluates the one hundred most populous metro areas based on factors such as VMT, fuel economy, and transit, bike, and pedestrian activity, highlights this. The report indicates that cities like San Jose excel due to low VMT, high electric vehicle penetration, and better fuel economy, despite lower transit scores. Conversely, regions like Augusta-Richmond and Omaha rank at the bottom, with higher VMT and less use of fuel-efficient vehicles or alternative transportation modes.

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 (MPO Eligible)

- FTA's [Ferry Programs](#)



- **Description:** Passenger Ferry Grant Program (Passenger Ferry Program), Electric or Low-Emitting Ferry Pilot Program (Low-No Ferry Program), and Ferry Service for Rural Communities Program (Rural Ferry Program) are all open for applications.
 - The Passenger Ferry Program: provides funding to improve the condition and quality of existing passenger ferry services, supports the establishment of new passenger ferry services, repair and modernize ferry boats, terminals, and related facilities and equipment.
 - The Low-No Ferry Program: provides funding for projects that support the purchase of electric or low-emitting ferries and the electrification of or other reduction of emissions from existing ferries.
 - The Rural Ferry Program: provides funding for capital, operating, and planning expenses for ferry service to rural areas.
- **Deadline:** June 17th, 2024.
- USDOT's [Modernizing NEPA Challenge](#)
 - **Description:** The Modernizing NEPA Challenge submissions must detail methods that make documents associated with the NEPA process more engaging and easier to navigate for participating or cooperating agencies, stakeholders, and the public. Submissions should be associated with a transportation project that is planned or underway. The transportation project may be in any level of NEPA review - Categorical Exclusion (CE), Environmental Assessment (EA), or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Use of existing tools, software, and platforms is encouraged.
 - **Deadline:** July 15th, 2024.

Upcoming (MPO Eligible)

- FHWA's [Pilot Program for Transit-Oriented Development](#)
 - **Description:** Provides funding to communities to integrate land use and transportation planning in new fixed guideway and core capacity transit project corridors. As required by statute, any comprehensive or site-specific planning funded through the pilot program must examine ways to improve economic development and ridership potential, foster multimodal connectivity and accessibility, improve transit access for pedestrian and bicycle traffic, engage the private sector, identify infrastructure needs, and enable mixed-use development near transit stations. The statute also requires that the planning work be associated with a new fixed guideway or core capacity transit project as defined in federal transit statute.
 - Expected NOFO: May 2024
- FHWA's [Low Carbon Transportation Materials Program](#)
 - **Description:** \$2 billion available to fund low carbon materials that create less pollution by reducing the levels of embodied greenhouse gas emissions, including concrete (and cement), glass, asphalt mix, and steel. In FHWA's Low Carbon Transportation Materials (LCTM) Program \$1.2 Billion is available to State DOTs through a RFA to fund activities and projects that advance the use of low carbon materials and products. This RFA approach will allow FHWA to quickly provide reimbursement or incentive funds to states to begin eligible activities and incorporate low carbon materials on construction projects now. In the coming months FHWA will also make available \$800 million to target non-State applicants, including metropolitan planning organizations, local governments or



agencies, tribes, and other agencies through a NOFO. FHWA encourages non-State applicants to partner with states on applications and projects.