



The National Beat

January 25th, 2024

Federal Updates

On January 22nd, The U.S. Census Bureau announced it's currently reviewing over 12,000 public comments on proposed changes to the 2025 American Community Survey (ACS) and Puerto Rico Community Survey ([read here](#)). These changes address topics like household roster, educational attainment, health insurance coverage, disability, and labor force questions.

On January 18th, Congress extended the deadline for government funding, leading to a postponement of the appropriations end date for USDOT and other agencies to March 1 ([read here](#)). This extension creates two separate deadlines: March 1 for agencies including USDOT, the Agriculture Department, and parts of the Defense and Energy Departments, among others; and March 8 for the remaining government departments.

On January 18th, the House T&I Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials held a hearing to discuss the oversight of railroad grade crossing elimination and safety issues ([watch here](#)). This discussion comes amid increased federal funding and public interest in railroad projects, such as California high-speed rail and the Gateway project, and heightened concern over railroad safety following train derailment incidents. The hearing underscored the importance of improving safety at at-grade railroad crossings, highlighted by the first round of funding awards through the Railroad Crossing Elimination grant program.

On January 17th, the House T&I Committee held a hearing on the state of transportation in the US ([watch here](#)). The focus was on the U.S. supply chain, successes and challenges of IIJA funding, and future needs for the transportation system. Discussions highlighted the critical role of the supply chain, the impact of IIJA funding on various transportation projects, and the need for continuous investment beyond IIJA's 2026 expiration. The hearing underscored the importance of sustained funding, workforce development, and regulatory flexibility to advance U.S. infrastructure and transportation systems.

On January 11th, the House passed a resolution (S.J. Res. 38) aiming to reverse a Biden administration rule seeking to expand access to EV charging stations ([read here](#)). This measure specifically targets a FHWA waiver from the Buy America rules for EV chargers funded by the IIJA. Despite rising support in both the House and Senate, President Biden has indicated a likely veto, asserting that the resolution could inadvertently lead to fewer American-made charging stations.

USDOT

On January 25th, FHWA released a NPRM to address updates to the National Performance Management Measures regulations ([read here](#)). The comment period ends on February 26, 2024, and it's currently open for public input. This rule proposes modifications considering the impacts of national emergencies on performance achievement, clarifying compliance determinations and penalty assessment for pavement condition measures, and refining data collection standards and requirements. It also aims to



adjust freight reporting to align with the 4-year update cycle for State Freight Plans in the IJJA and provide select technical corrections. Additionally, the rulemaking proposes to incorporate the Highway Performance Monitoring System Field Manual for updated field names related to TPM data collection. The rule also intends to enhance opportunities for meaningful safety performance targets and outcomes, explore alternative safety performance measures, and align performance targets with the NHTSA standards.

On January 25th, USDOT announced \$4.9 billion investment for 37 infrastructure projects through the Mega and INFRA grant programs ([read here](#)). This funding will support large, complex, and innovative projects, including 11 through the Mega program and 28 through the INFRA program, enhancing economic, mobility, and safety benefits nationally and regionally. These projects include significant improvements like bridge replacements and multimodal corridor enhancements, with a focus on both urban and rural areas. The largest, a \$1.06 billion grant, was awarded to the Blatnik Bridge replacement project in Minnesota and Wisconsin. USDOT received 117 applications requesting \$24.7 billion in Mega funding and 190 applications requesting \$24.8 billion from the INFRA program.

On January 23rd, FHWA allocated \$729.4 million to 34 states, D.C., the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico for the repair and rebuilding of infrastructure damaged by natural disasters and extreme weather ([read here](#)). This funding, part of the USDOT's strategy to combat climate change effects, aims to restore crucial transportation links affected by events like hurricanes, flooding, and mudslides. These funds will support various states in addressing specific climate-related damages and contribute to building more durable, climate-resilient transportation networks.

On January 19th, USDOT Secretary Buttigieg made remarks at the 2024 TRB annual meeting ([read here](#)). He reviewed the Biden administration's achievements in transportation, emphasizing advancements in aviation and rail safety, roadway improvements, and job creation through infrastructure projects. Buttigieg stressed the role of transportation in confronting climate change and promoting equity, noting efforts to build an EV charging network and improve public transit.

On January 19th, following a lawsuit by 21 states, FHWA agreed to a 45-day extension deadline to submit plans for reducing GHG emissions from February 1st to March 17th ([read here](#)). The legal proceedings in this case are ongoing, with a response to a preliminary injunction motion expected by February 14th. This lawsuit challenges the authority of the FHWA and USDOT to regulate GHG emissions ([read motion here](#)). The new FHWA rule mandates that states and MPOs develop and track carbon dioxide reduction targets.

On January 18th, FHWA released new resources on Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) available in the FHWA Environmental Review Toolkit ([access here](#)). These include the PEL Handbook, offering detailed guidance on effective PEL implementation and its integration in environmental reviews, and three step-by-step PEL Flowcharts covering authorities ([access here](#)), purpose and need ([access here](#)), and alternatives ([access here](#)). PEL is crucial for enhancing efficiencies in transportation project development, ensuring an integrated decision-making process that considers environmental, community, and economic impacts.

On January 18th, FRA released new tools for grantees, including the Locomotive Emissions Comparison Tool, to aid in funding applications for upgrading or replacing old locomotives ([read here](#)). This tool is



particularly useful for projects under the CRISI and FSP grant programs, allowing users to estimate emissions reductions for replacing diesel engines. Additionally, the Justice40 Rail Explorer, a mapping tool, helps grantees assess the impact of rail projects on surrounding communities.

On January 18th, USDOT announced nearly \$150 million in grants to enhance the reliability of almost 4,500 public EV charging stations across 20 states ([read here](#)). This funding, part of the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) Formula Program under the IIJA aims to repair or upgrade existing EV chargers and supports the administration's goal of establishing a nationwide, reliable, and American-made EV charging network. These efforts are part of a broader initiative to facilitate the transition to electric vehicles and build resilient, accessible charging infrastructure across urban and rural areas.

On January 18th, FTA announced it will host a webinar on February 7th on "Integrating Asset Management into the Transportation Planning and Programming Process," ([register here](#)). The session will highlight the findings of the FHWA/FTA integration of asset management into planning and programming initiative, including case studies and peer exchanges. The webinar aims to explore how State DOTs, MPOs, and transit agencies are effectively using data analysis and agency coordination to link their planning and programming efforts to asset management.

On January 17th, FHWA announced \$148.8 million in grants to 24 applicants across 20 states through the Electric Vehicle Charger Reliability and Accessibility Accelerator Program ([read here](#)). This funding is for repairing or replacing non-functional electric vehicle charging ports to enhance the existing charging infrastructure's reliability. The grants were awarded to a mix of 14 State DOTs and 10 local entities, supporting the repair or replacement of a total of 4,471 EV charging ports.

On January 12th, USDOT released the "Project Readiness Checklist" on the DOT Navigator ([access here](#)). This new tool is designed to assist project sponsors and grant applicants in preparing projects for federal funding. It focuses on project readiness, which evaluates an applicant's preparedness for project delivery. The checklist covers various aspects including transportation planning, public engagement, coordination with implementation partners, navigating federal environmental compliance, and organizational management of the project and federal grant processes.

On January 11th, USDOT announced \$623 million in grants from the IIJA to enhance the U.S. EV charging network ([read here](#)). This funding, from the Charging and Fueling Infrastructure (CFI) Discretionary Grant Program, will support the construction of approximately 7,500 EV charging ports across 22 states and Puerto Rico. This initiative aligns with the administration's goal of establishing 500,000 public EV chargers by 2030.

Congressional Hearings, Meetings, & Markups

- On January 18th, The House Energy, Climate, and Grid Security Subcommittee held a hearing to inform the reauthorization of the PHMSA ([watch here](#)).
- On January 18th, The House T&I Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials held a hearing to discuss the oversight of railroad grade crossing elimination and safety issues ([watch here](#)).



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National Transportation News

On January 23rd, the Brightline West high-speed rail project received \$2.5 billion in private activity bond authority from USDOT ([read here](#)). This funding is a significant step in financing the \$12 billion project. The rail line, running along a 218-mile route with trains capable of speeds up to 186 mph will offer a travel time of less than two hours. The project, which received a \$3 billion federal grant a month ago, is expected to boost tourism, create 35,000 jobs, ease traffic, and reduce carbon emissions. The use of private activity bonds will enable access to tax-exempt interest rates, lowering capital costs.

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 soon**
- 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.