

# The National Beat

## October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024

### Contents

Federal Updates.....	1
USDOT.....	2
Congressional Hearings, Meetings, & Markups.....	4
National Transportation News.....	4
NOFOs .....	5
Reauthorization and AMPO’s Approach.....	6

### Federal Updates

On October 24<sup>th</sup>, the Department of Justice announced a \$101.9 million settlement with the companies owning the container ship Dali, which crashed into Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge in March, causing the bridge to collapse. The funds will reimburse federal agencies for disaster response and cleanup of 50,000 tons of debris from the Patapsco River. This settlement follows a \$97.2 million payout for oil pollution damage but does not cover bridge reconstruction costs, for which Maryland is pursuing a separate claim. The White House has also requested \$3.1 billion for additional emergency relief. [Read more here.](#)

On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, reports indicated that Rep. Sam Graves (R-Mo) faces slim chances of securing a waiver to continue as chair of the House T&I Committee, with republican leaders seeking to introduce new members into key roles. While Graves has actively lobbied for a waiver, citing his experience and intention to shape the next surface transportation bill, House Republicans remain hesitant to grant extended terms in leadership positions. Graves' challenger, Rep. Rick Crawford (R-ARK), is campaigning for the chair position, planning to present a policy platform if steering denies Graves a waiver. [Read more here.](#)

On October 21<sup>st</sup>, Republican leaders of the House T&I Committee criticized the administration for delaying a crucial drone rule, originally mandated to be proposed by September 2024. The rule would permit drones to fly beyond visual line of sight, expanding operational capabilities for various industries. Lawmakers, including Reps. Sam Graves (R-MO) and Garret Graves (R-LA), expressed frustration over the delay until at least January 2025, calling the inaction a failure to meet statutory deadlines and a potential setback for final rule issuance. The FAA has committed to responding directly to lawmakers. [Read more here.](#)

On October 19<sup>th</sup>, POLITICO reported on potential candidates for a Cabinet position under current Vice President Kamala Harris if she wins the presidency. While Harris has not highlighted transportation in her campaign, experts expect her administration to continue policies aimed at reducing transportation-related emissions. Key contenders include Polly Trottenberg, Deputy Secretary of Transportation,

Shailen Bhatt, former FHWA Administrator, and Francis Suarez, Miami's Mayor. [Read more here](#). *If you're unable to access the article, please email Katie Economou at, [keconomou@ampo.org](mailto:keconomou@ampo.org).*

On October 19<sup>th</sup>, POLITICO reported on potential candidates for a Cabinet position under former President Donald Trump, if he wins the presidency. Trump's next potential Transportation chief will likely be expected to focus taxpayer money on infrastructure like roads and highways, instead of transit. Key contenders include Garret Graves (R-LA) and House T&I Committee Chair, Sam Graves (R-MO). [Read more here](#). *If you're unable to access the article, please email Katie Economou at, [keconomou@ampo.org](mailto:keconomou@ampo.org).*

On October 18<sup>th</sup>, the Bureau of the Fiscal Service released receipts that show the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) incurred a \$21 billion deficit for fiscal year 2024, significantly higher than the \$11.9 billion deficit from the previous year. Reporting by Eno Transportation found that flat receipts (\$48.2 billion) contrasted with a \$9 billion increase in outlays (\$69.2 billion) due to increased funding from the IIJA. This actual deficit was \$6.8 billion worse than projections by the Congressional Budget Office in June 2024. Current trends suggest the HTF may face a shortfall as early as 2028. [Read here](#).

On October 17<sup>th</sup>, DOE's Energy Loan Programs Office tentatively committed up to \$670.6 million to Aspen Aerogels Georgia to boost the manufacturing of electric vehicle battery safety components. The loan will support the construction of a facility, which will produce thermal barriers designed to prevent EV battery overheating and fires. [Read more here](#).

## **USDOT**

On October 30<sup>th</sup>, the Build America Bureau announced a \$544.6 million TIFIA loan to upgrade the San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system with 775 new railcars. This initiative is part of BART's \$2.2 billion "Fleet of the Future" project, enhancing safety, efficiency, and accessibility for millions of riders. Assembled in the U.S. and utilizing energy-saving technologies, the new railcars will help modernize transit across the Bay Area. [Read more here](#).

On October 29<sup>th</sup>, FTA announced the development of a Prototype Programmatic Agreement (PA) for Minor Transportation Activities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). This flexible Prototype PA will facilitate faster, more efficient implementation by streamlining state-by-state Section 106 compliance processes for minor activities, while preserving consultation requirements for potentially impactful projects. A webinar on November 21, 2024, will outline the PA's framework and solicit input (details will be shared in the coming week). Reach out to FTA contact, Elizabeth Breiseth, at [PrototypePA@dot.gov](mailto:PrototypePA@dot.gov) with questions.

On October 28<sup>th</sup>, the Build America Bureau released a NOFO for up to \$10 million in grants through the Regional Infrastructure Accelerators (RIA) Program. This funding supports project development and technical resources for regional infrastructure initiatives, with a focus on innovative financing like public-private partnerships. Build America Bureau's Executive Director Morteza Farajian commented, "We encourage regional organizations to apply." Register for the informational webinar on November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2 p.m. ET to learn more and view program details [here](#). Applications are due January 9, 2025, at 11:59 PM ET. [View the NOFO here](#).

On October 29<sup>th</sup>, FRA announced over \$2.4 billion in funding for 122 rail projects in 41 states and Washington, D.C., provided through the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements

(CRISI) Program. This funding will support rail infrastructure upgrades, improve safety and efficiency, strengthen supply chains, and expand passenger rail. Selected projects include track upgrades, bridge rehabilitations, port rail connections, and workforce training programs. [Read more here.](#)

On October 29<sup>th</sup>, FTA announced a new rule setting minimum safety standards for rail transit agencies to protect workers on transit railways. The rule mandates that rail transit agencies establish an approved Roadway Worker Protection Program within one year, emphasizing comprehensive safety training and reporting mechanisms. [Read more here.](#)

On October 28<sup>th</sup>, FTA awarded the University of Cincinnati \$5.1 million to implement digital platforms aimed at improving transit construction project delivery and reducing costs. Funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the program will test advanced digital construction management systems to enhance efficiency and project outcomes. The University's project findings will inform a best practices guide for other transit agencies. [Read more here.](#)

On October 28<sup>th</sup>, the FRA proposed a new rule to ensure petitions for regulatory relief meet high safety standards and serve public interests. The rule would require waiver requests to demonstrate rail safety and include proactive consultation with affected stakeholders, such as rail workers and local communities. [Read more here.](#)

On October 25<sup>th</sup>, FHWA released the NOFO for the FY 2024-2026 Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Program. The program provides grants for projects aimed at enhancing surface transportation resilience to natural hazards, including climate change and extreme weather. Applications for FY 2024-2025 are due by February 24, 2025, and for FY 2026 by February 24, 2026. FHWA will host several informational webinars to guide applicants. Learn more [here](#) and view the [NOFO here](#).

On October 24<sup>th</sup>, FHWA announced over \$96 million in Advanced Transportation Technology and Innovation (ATTAIN) grants for 20 projects across 16 states. These grants aim to improve safety, reduce travel times, and enhance mobility through technology-based solutions, including smart traffic systems, vehicle-to-everything (V2X) communication, and real-time hazard notifications. Projects will prioritize multimodal access and serve disadvantaged communities nationwide. [Read more here.](#)

October 22<sup>nd</sup>, PHMSA announced \$196 million in grants from the Natural Gas Distribution Infrastructure Safety and Modernization Grants (NGDISM) to modernize natural gas pipelines across 20 states. This funding supports 60 projects to improve safety, lower energy bills, and reduce methane emissions. These investments will help communities nationwide by repairing aging pipelines, cutting pollution, and enhancing public safety. [Read more here.](#)

On October 21<sup>st</sup>, FHWA announced over \$4.2 billion in infrastructure funding for 44 major projects across the US, provided through the INFRA and Mega grant programs. Selected projects address safety, mobility, and economic competitiveness, such as bridge replacements, port expansions, and highway upgrades. [Read more here.](#)

On October 18<sup>th</sup>, FHWA released \$10 million in Emergency Relief funding to the Virginia Department of Transportation. This initial "quick release" funding will aid in immediate emergency repairs following Hurricane Helene, especially on Route 58, where significant washouts have necessitated a 30-mile detour. [Read more here.](#)

On October 18<sup>th</sup>, NHTSA opened an inquiry into Tesla's Full Self Driving (FSD) technology after four crashes occurred in low-visibility conditions while using FSD, including one fatal pedestrian incident. The investigation covers Tesla models from 2016-2024 and aims to assess FSD's ability to detect and respond in challenging visibility. NHTSA previously launched a related inquiry in April following 20 crash reports linked to Tesla's autopilot system. Tesla has yet to comment. [Read more here.](#)

On October 17<sup>th</sup>, FHWA announced awards from the Congestion Relief Grant Program, to support innovative projects aimed at reducing congestion in urban areas. Awards include \$12.9 million for Phoenix's Project EASE, \$14.5 million for California's Sustainable Mobility Wallet Project, and \$39.6 million for Utah's I-15 Coordinated Adaptive Ramp Metering Project, among others. [Read here.](#)

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

*Both the House and Senate are on Recess until November 12<sup>th</sup>.*

- On September 25<sup>th</sup>, the House T&I Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management held a hearing to examine the role and effectiveness of building codes in mitigating against disasters. [Watch here.](#)
- On September 25<sup>th</sup>, the House T&I Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation held a hearing on investments to support Coast Guard personnel. [Watch here.](#)
- On September 25<sup>th</sup>, the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee a nominations hearing considering three candidates for key transportation positions. [Watch hearing here.](#)

## **National Transportation News**

On October 29, the European Commission approved new duties on electric vehicles manufactured in China, set to take effect this week. These duties, ranging from 7.8% to 35.3%, will be applied based on the level of state subsidies received by each manufacturer. Following a 13-month investigation into subsidy practices, the Commission aims to address competitive imbalances in the EU's EV market. [Read more here.](#)

On October 24<sup>th</sup>, several lawmakers urged Stellantis to honor its UAW contract commitments amid reports of production shifts and a delayed Illinois plant reopening. More than two dozen senators noted Stellantis's \$8 billion in stock buybacks as evidence of its capacity to maintain U.S. operations. This follows the United Auto Workers' recent unfair labor practice complaint, alleging Stellantis may relocate Dodge Durango production to Canada, contravening its promise to keep production in Detroit. Stellantis maintains it is adhering to the 2023 bargaining agreement but acknowledged a delay at the Illinois facility. [Read more here.](#)

On October 22<sup>nd</sup>, Bloomberg noted that transportation policy is taking a back seat in the 2024 presidential race, with candidates Kamala Harris and Donald Trump rarely addressing the topic. The outcome of the election could, however, significantly impact federal infrastructure funding, especially under the RAISE program. Studies from the Urban Institute highlight stark contrasts in how the Trump and Biden administrations prioritized projects, with Trump favoring road expansions in predominantly

White rural areas and Biden supporting transit and pedestrian projects in historically underserved communities. [Read more here.](#)

On October 21<sup>st</sup>, Norfolk Southern reported significant third-quarter financial impacts from the 2023 East Palestine derailment, a recent dockworkers strike, and Hurricane Helene. The railroad spent \$129 million on issues tied to the derailment but recovered \$288 million in insurance, totaling over \$650 million in cumulative recoveries. The dock strike disrupted international intermodal volumes, which Norfolk Southern expects to recoup in coming months. Meanwhile, Hurricane Helene caused extensive infrastructure damage, affecting operations in the southeast. Despite these challenges, Norfolk Southern's revenues rose by three percent to \$3.1 billion compared to Q3 2023. [Read more here.](#)

## NOFOs

Learn about federal grants available to MPOs and key NOFO information in AMPO's NOFO Tracker ([access here](#)). The tracker is also available on [ampo.org](#) under the "Resources" drop down.

### New (MPO Eligible)

- FHWA's [Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation \(PROTECT\) Program](#)
  - **Description:** Program to plan for and strengthen surface transportation to be more resilient to natural hazards, including climate change, sea level rise, flooding, extreme weather events, and other natural disasters. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides over \$1.4 billion over five years through this program to fund projects that address the climate crisis by improving the resilience of the surface transportation system, including highways, public transportation, ports, and intercity passenger rail.
    - FHWA will be hosting several informational webinars in the coming months ([register here](#)).
  - **Deadlines:**
    - **FY 2024-2025:** 2/24/2025
    - **FY 2026:** 2/24/2026
- Build America Bureau's, [Regional Infrastructure Accelerators \(RIA\) Program](#)
  - **Description:** Regional Infrastructure Accelerator (RIA) grants assist entities in developing improved infrastructure priorities and financing strategies for the accelerated development of a project that is eligible for funding under the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) Credit Program. These grants are intended to support RIAs that: (1) serve a defined geographic area; (2) act as a resource to qualified entities in the geographic area; and (3) demonstrate the effectiveness of the RIA to expedite the delivery of projects eligible for the TIFIA credit program.
    - A webinar will be hosted on November 13<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 PM (ET) ([register here](#)).
  - **Deadlines:** 1/9/25

### Upcoming NOFOs (MPO Eligible)

- FTA's [All Stations Accessibility Program](#): Expected November, 2024.

- OST's [Rural and Tribal Assistance Pilot Program](#): Expected November, 2024.
- USDOT's [Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity \(RAISE\)](#): Expected November, 2024.
- Maritime Administration's [Port Infrastructure Development Program \(PIDP\)](#): Expected December, 2024.
- USDOT's [Reduction of Truck Emissions at Port Facilities \(RTEPF\) Program](#): Expected December, 2024.

## Reauthorization and AMPO's Approach

Visit AMPO's reauthorization [webpage](#) to learn more about our legislative priorities and read our new survey reports and issue papers. As reauthorization nears, AMPO is working closely with policymakers and partners to prioritize MPO concerns. Our strategies include coalition building, grassroots mobilization, data-driven advocacy, and strategic communication to ensure our collective voice is heard.

We encourage MPOs to share stories that highlight the critical work they do and emphasize the importance of adequate resources and authority in effective transportation planning. These stories will help demonstrate the real-world impact MPOs have on communities and the significant role transportation funding plays in driving positive change. [Share your story here!](#)

We're looking forward to sharing more information in the coming weeks with our members and industry partners as we move towards reauthorization. If you have any questions, please reach out to Katie Economou at [keconomou@ampo.org](mailto:keconomou@ampo.org).