



**TRANSPORTATION FOR AMERICA IS A** broad and growing coalition of national, state and local organizations calling for the renewal of our national transportation program for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our individual missions are diverse – transportation, housing, environment, business, real estate, social equity, public health, urban planning, and other arenas – but we share the goal of building a modernized infrastructure to support a robust economy and healthy communities where people can live, work and play. We seek to align national, state, and local transportation policies with an array of national priorities, including economic opportunity, climate protection, energy security, health, housing and community development.

This platform document is intended to help shape the principles, policies and programs that can ensure that the forthcoming update of federal transportation legislation – the successor to the expiring SAFETEA-LU law – will put our nation on the path to a smarter and more sustainable future. It represents an intensive effort on the part of hundreds of practitioners and stakeholders to distill the best ideas, building on what works in current law and offering new innovations to address modern challenges and opportunities.

## Executive Summary

**IN 1956, PRESIDENT DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER** signed into law a new federal transportation bill with an ambitious vision to link America's cities and states with a network of long-distance superhighways that would allow people, commerce, and the military to move rapidly from one part of the country to another. This bill, commonly known as the National Interstate Highways and Defense Act was one of the most important national infrastructure laws of the 20th century.

Fifty years later, the Interstate Highway System as originally envisioned has been built, and America stands in desperate need of a new vision for our national transportation system. Just as the Interstate highway bill answered some of the most pressing mobility needs of the nation in the mid-20th century, a new federal transportation bill must answer the vastly different needs of America in the 21st century.

The next transportation program must set about the urgent task of repairing and maintaining our existing transportation assets, building out the rest of the transportation network, and making our current system work more efficiently. Modern and affordable public transportation, safe places to walk and bicycle, smarter highways that use technology and tolling to better manage congestion, land use policies that reduce travel demand by locating more affordable housing near jobs and services, and long-distance rail networks all have the potential to help us reduce our oil dependency, slow climate change, improve social equity and public health, and fashion a vibrant new economy. Getting there from here will require some significant reforms in the next federal transportation bill.

***As Congress develops the next transportation authorization, these six priorities should guide them.***

### **■ ESTABLISH ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT**

Under the current system, most federal transportation dollars go to state departments of transportation, with few questions asked. DOTs remain largely geared toward building highways between metropolitan areas rather than providing multiple options for mobility within metropolitan areas. This is despite the fact that the United States population is highly urbanized, with 80 percent of us living in metropolitan areas and 85 percent of our nation's economic activity occurring within them. The current law assigns metropolitan areas responsibility for transportation planning, but it does not give them real authority to implement those plans.

- *Transportation agencies must be held accountable for investments that promise to deliver safe, efficient and economical transportation for all Americans. Congress should use the next federal transportation bill to:*
- *Establish National Transportation Objectives to guide how transportation investments address issues such as energy security, mobility options, safety, national security, equal access for poor and minority communities, economic competitiveness, climate change, and affordability.*
- *Link funding levels to achievement of these goals. Progress in achieving federal goals should be linked to an increased federal match or access to increased funding.*
- *Restructure the program categories, funding allocations, and project eligibility criteria to put all modes on an equal footing in determining eligibility for federal funds.*
- *Empower metropolitan areas to shape their future by shifting more transportation money and decision-making to them, while also holding them accountable for results through a new Metropolitan Mobility Program.*

**Congress should not shy away from restructuring the federal transportation program and its agencies to meet new goals. The next bill should:**

- *Require a fix-it-first approach to restore our crumbling highways, bridges and transit systems and set “State of Good Repair” criteria, with financial incentives for compliance.*
- *Hold state and local transportation agencies accountable for meeting the transportation needs of an increasingly diverse America, in particular its seniors, people in poverty and disabled citizens. This means planning our transportation systems – and our development patterns – to ensure that there are convenient and affordable travel options available to everyone for every stage of life.*
- *Adopt a “complete streets” approach that provides for the safety and comfort of everyone traveling along a corridor, whether by car, bicycle, foot, or public transit.*

**2 INVEST TO COMPETE IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

**POORLY PLANNED TRANSPORTATION** investments, combined with spread-out development patterns, has forced families to spend 20 percent or more of their household budgets for transportation. Many spend hours driving in congestion every day, reducing their productivity. Our heavy reliance on oil leaves the nation’s economy vulnerable to inevitable price shocks. The absence of high-speed rail lines and sophisticated, long-distance freight systems common in other nations puts us at a competitive disadvantage. Our aging infrastructure is placing a strain on state and local budgets, often leaving metropolitan areas with few resources to remake transportation networks that can revitalize cities and towns. Without smart, strategic investments in modern transportation systems, America will be supplanted as the world’s most productive economy.

**We must catch and pass competitors in China and Europe by modernizing and expanding our rail, freight, and transit networks. Some initiatives to address these issues include:**

- *Create a new Metropolitan Mobility Program that would support regional investments in smarter highway system management, transit expansion, demand management, and bicycle and pedestrian improvements.*
- *Create a national program to bring modern, convenient public transportation networks to the nation’s 50 largest metropolitan areas by 2030, and provide incentives for building neighborhoods and business districts around transit connections, with housing for a wide range of incomes.*
- *Create a National Freight and Passenger Rail Program aimed at completing an intercity passenger rail network by 2030 with direct high-speed rail service linking our nation’s largest cities.*
- *Establish a National Infrastructure Commission to identify investments of national priority, focusing on multimodal intercity corridors, a national intercity rail network, and key freight corridors.*
- *Create a mechanism to monitor changes in user fees such as transit fares, toll roads, and congestion pricing to reduce the cost burdens on low- and moderate-income families.*

**3 INVEST FOR MULTIPLE PAYOFFS IN SOLVING OUR ENERGY, AIR QUALITY, AND CLIMATE CHALLENGES**

**OUR FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION** investments can work simultaneously to end our overwhelming reliance on oil, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, clean up polluting ports and trucks, and help Americans save money through these actions:

- *Establish National Transportation Objectives that include two important targets for the year 2050: reducing reliance on petroleum for transportation to no more than 20 percent (from more than 95% today), and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector to 80 percent below 1990 levels. Link funding to achievement of these goals.*
- *Expand the current Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program into a broader program of energy conservation, air pollution, and greenhouse gas reduction.*
- *Provide significant funding so that our ports and freight system – trucks and trains – are as clean as possible. Ports, highways, and railroad corridors with heavy freight usage have significant public health risks that typically fall disproportionately on low-income and minority communities that are often located closest to these facilities*
- *Create a new Smart Innovations program to assist communities in their efforts to build neighborhoods that include affordable housing in accessible locations; retrofit dangerous roads to become complete streets; implement car- and bicycle-sharing programs; deploy information technology to make highways and transit systems smarter; and implement other energy-saving, community-enhancing ideas being developed around the country.*

**4 REWARD AND SUPPORT SMART LOCAL LAND USE PLANNING**

**THE MOST EFFICIENT TRIP** is the shortest – or the one you don’t have to take at all. More than 60 percent of the growth in

driving is due not to population or economic growth, but to spread-out development.

Our nation can no longer afford the endless cycle of building roads, allowing them to become overwhelmed by poorly planned development, and widening or building again. The federal transportation program can encourage coordinated planning between transportation facilities and land use, ending the de facto subsidization of unsustainable development through these initiatives:

- *Set national transportation objectives for transportation and location efficiency that reward investments that help locate destinations closer to each other and to transit centers.*
- *Create a tax-credit incentive to support development around transit stations, while lifting existing barriers to using transportation funds on land use and infrastructure projects that will help reduce driving.*
- *Provide technical assistance for sophisticated travel forecasting that takes land use into account and for planning that coordinates land use policies and transportation investments.*
- *Require scenario planning – similar to Envision Utah or the Sacramento Blueprint – to ensure efficient transportation investments that meet the desires of citizens, and then provide the funding flexibility for metropolitan areas and localities to implement these plans.*

## **5 INVEST FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY**

**OUR TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM** can do much more to foster human health and safety. While other countries have made strides on safety, traffic deaths in the United States hover around 43,000 people per year, with disproportionate deaths among older Americans, pedestrians, and bicyclists. Millions of Americans, and particularly those in low-income communities, face asthma and other health problems caused by pollution from cars and trucks. Wide streets with fast traffic and no sidewalks or bike lanes discourage this physical activity, contributing to associated health effects.

Local innovations in roadway design and operations have effectively reduced the rate of death and injury on our streets, and should be encouraged across the country. The federal transportation program could also help get Americans moving with programs to make active transportation the cornerstones of a higher quality of life.

- *Set health and safety targets in the National Transportation Objectives, and require best practices in “active transportation” and context-sensitive roadway design (or Context-Sensitive Solutions) for program and project eligibility.*
- *Set aside a substantial share of funds for non-motorized safety initiatives in the Safety Program.*
- *Integrate existing disparate programs into an expanded and integrated new program to provide transportation options for older and disabled Americans, including para-transit service.*
- *Include health impact assessments as a regular part of environmental review for projects, and fund the mitigation of negative health impacts of highways, diesel rail, and freight facilities on nearby residential areas.*

## **6 FIND NEW WAYS TO PAY FOR WHAT WE NEED**

**FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION FUNDING** has long relied almost exclusively on taxing each gallon of gas, but the limitations of this source have become clear. Congress has already propped up the Highway Trust Fund with general funds. The situation could get worse if the drop in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) that began in 2007 continues, draining expected revenues. Opposition to raising the tax is strong, as Americans already cope with high transportation costs. A revenue distribution scheme that rewards the states whose population drives the most runs counter to other national goals.

We need to develop new long-term revenue sources that are complementary to the nation’s need for energy efficiency and continue to protect our investment in our public assets. Transportation for America stands ready to support an increase in federal transportation investments if – and only if – they are directed towards the sorts of priorities and objectives outlined in this document.

### ***In rewriting the nation’s federal transportation law, Congress should:***

- *Begin serious exploration of a new set of sustainable and equitable federal funding sources for transportation, including the potential for a federal transportation tax based on miles driven rather than gasoline consumed.*
- *Direct a significant share of revenue from future cap-and-trade or carbon tax programs from transportation sources to transforming our transportation system toward greater efficiency and reduced carbon emissions.*
- *Establish a National Infrastructure and Transportation Bank funded by capturing some of the economic value created by the placement of infrastructure investments.*
- *Evaluate and mitigate the burden of transportation costs on low- and moderate-income families.*
- *Protect public assets by creating clear guidelines for public-private partnerships such as toll facilities and congestion pricing systems.*