



# NACTO

National  
Association  
of City  
Transportation  
Officials

The Next U.S.  
Transportation Bill  
September 2008

# NACTO

## National Association of City Transportation Officials

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## The Next U.S. Transportation Bill

### PRINCIPLES FOR AUTHORIZATION

#### The National Association of City Transportation Officials

The National Association of City Transportation Officials NACTO is a partnership of the transportation departments in 13 of the largest cities in the United States. Our cities are the centers of the country's largest metropolitan areas. Metropolitan centers, in turn, are the heart of the U.S. economy and the homes of a large and growing share of the nation's population. The 100 largest metro areas account for 75 percent of gross domestic product and 65 percent of our people. We compete globally with other major world cities as places of commerce, as residences for the world's most talented professionals and most

driven entrepreneurs, and as the nation's gateways and symbols to the world community. Both within and between metropolitan areas, our transportation systems are major forces that facilitate and drive the economy, but they are underperforming in this regard. Numerous studies have spotlighted the economic dangers of a transportation system in disrepair.

We call for a federal transportation program that reflects these facts, and plays a central role in improving all aspects of transportation in the United States.

**Cover Photo:** South Lake Union Streetcar, Seattle

**Photo Above:** Replacement span for the 3rd Avenue Bridge passes beneath the Brooklyn Bridge on its way to the Harlem River in New York



# An Urban Agenda for the Next FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION AUTHORIZATION

At each of our transportation departments, we work daily to repair aging streets, bridges and transit systems, under tightly constrained budgets. At the same time, we experience constant demand from the public to improve transportation in the areas of safety, mobility, comfort, choice and reduced impact – and we hear that message loud and clear.

We face a dynamic set of challenges. In many places, city populations are growing and older urban infrastructures are experiencing ever-heavier usage. Fuel prices and traffic congestion are increasingly driving consumers to seek alternatives to driving. Trucks – the vehicles with the greatest impact on safety, the environment and infrastructure – are the fastest growing segment of traffic. Health impacts like asthma and quality of life issues such as the sheer amount of space occupied by vehicle traffic and noise from roadways add up to mounting concern about the quality and sustainability of our transportation systems. Overcrowding on the networks that connect cities to one another – our highways, airports and railways – is worsening. Finally, global climate change will impose greater physical stresses on the transportation infrastructure through floods, heat waves and more intense storms. These threats demand that the transportation sector play a major role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In the face of these challenges, big cities have become engines of American innovation in transportation. A wealth of successful practical and policy experience is developing in our agencies in areas such as speeding buses through traffic congestion, shifting travel to mass transit, bicycling and walking, operating networks of special lanes, reducing traffic injuries and fatalities, cutting emissions from official and private vehicles, managing impacts from increasing truck traffic, remaking utilitarian streetscapes into attractive city neighborhoods, and reducing traffic congestion with new parking policies.

This platform reflects that experience and innovation, and seeks to carry it into the nation's transportation program. It calls for:

- A significant increase in Federal transportation infrastructure investment
- Program emphasis on energy independence and sustainability
- An urban focus that heightens the Federal commitment to mass transit and other alternatives to highways and private autos
- A dramatically streamlined and simplified federal aid process, with direct funding for large cities.



Big cities  
have become  
engines of  
American  
innovation in  
transportation

**Photo Top Right:** Bicyclist on Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago  
**Photo Left:** San Francisco Streetcar



# NACTO's Themes for Federal TRANSPORTATION POLICY & U.S. DOT PROGRAM

## 1. Reinforce our Nation's Investment in Infrastructure

We have invested hundreds of billions of dollars in the past fifty years in the federal transportation system. Many elements of these systems have matured or have indeed suffered from inadequate maintenance and require regular and stepped-up investment to maintain safety and functionality. Public transportation systems, older roadways and older bridges should be targeted for reconstruction or rehabilitation.

Our competitors around the globe are investing heavily in their infrastructures, while investment in America has dwindled over time as a share of our gross domestic product (GDP) and our investment is now actually shrinking in terms of purchasing power. China is currently spending nine percent of its GDP on infrastructure; India is spending five percent. In the U.S., we are spending about two percent. Growth around the world is also driving up the prices of basic construction materials like concrete and steel, further reducing the buying power of current funding levels.

### Fully Fund Preventive Maintenance

2007 saw the collapse of the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis. 2008 so far has seen a multi-day closure of a two-mile stretch of I-95 in Philadelphia for emergency repair work and the buckling of the Birmingham Bridge in Pittsburgh. The Minnesota bridge collapse caused several

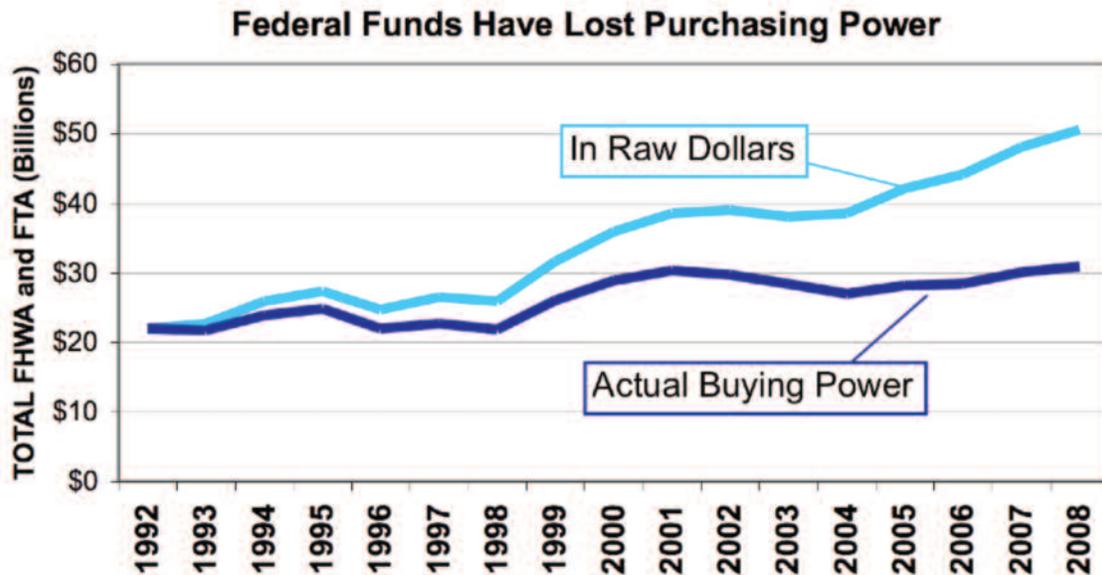
deaths and has had a huge economic impact in Minneapolis. Estimates of the cost due to lost person-hours and added vehicle miles traveled because of the I-95 closure are around \$60 million. The partial failure of the Birmingham Bridge in Pittsburgh in February caused diversion of over 23,000 vehicle trips per day for four weeks. These may be tips of the iceberg in a stream of crises ahead for our aging and under-funded transportation infrastructure. The federal government must support a significantly expanded and consistently funded preventive maintenance program that puts resources where they are needed most – in the upkeep of the older, most heavily-used parts of the transportation system, before their failure requires costly and disruptive shut-downs. The effort should bring transportation systems to standards able to meet the reasonably expected stresses climate change will bring to infrastructure.

Infrastructure  
investment in  
America has  
dwindled  
over time



**Photo Above:** I-35W bridge in Minneapolis after its collapse on August 1, 2007 courtesy of Flickr, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/74486811@N00/980907582/>

**Photo Left:** Construction of the North Avenue Bridge, Chicago



Source: FHWA and FTA for obligation amounts, Engineering News Record for Construction Cost Index.

## Shore up the Highway Trust Fund without raiding the Mass Transit Account

### Create a Reliable and Sufficient Stream of Funding to Repair and Maintain Transportation Infrastructure

Funding for roadway and public transportation repair must be sufficient and reliable to bring our federally funded system to good repair. Funding for new roadway capacity should be made contingent upon attainment of state of good repair goals for bridge and roadway conditions.

### Bring Public Transportation into a State of Good Repair

The public transportation system in the U.S. has long been under-funded, and a significant investment will be needed to bring it into good repair. Funds for the ferry system should be allocated based on a formula so reliable funding is available for repair. Ferry projects should be structured around a national ferry system, providing transportation choice and efficiencies in congested corridors. Public transportation should be a priority that is funded to match the need.

### Address the Future of Transportation Funding

For the short term, the federal government will need to shore up the Highway Trust Fund before it goes into the red in 2009. This should be done without raiding the Mass Transit Fund, however, since that would simply spread the problem to even more projects and unfairly burden cities. In the medium term, the federal government could do much to even out the flow of federal funds from year to year.

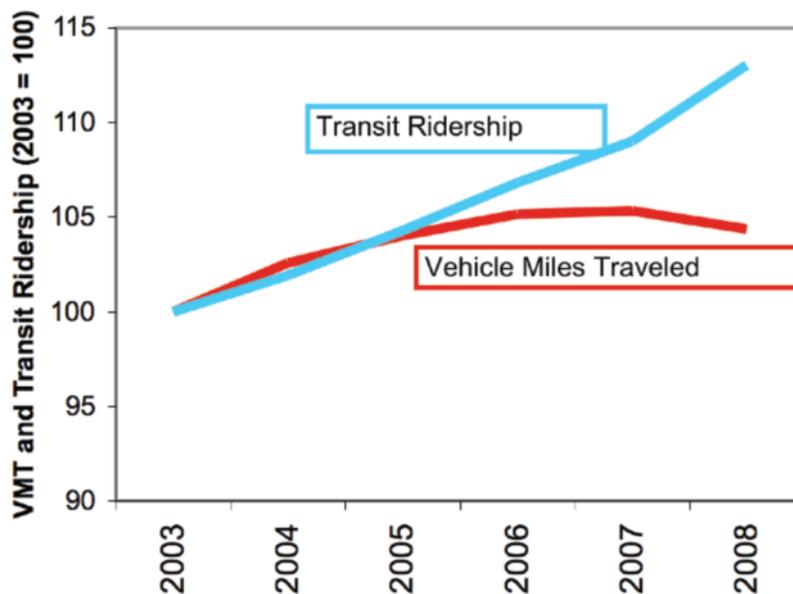
The confusion resulting from obligation limitation that is less than 90 percent of available funds, rescissions, and possible negative Revenue Aligned Budget Authority (RABA) is an unnecessary result of a failure to provide a consistent and steady funding source and erodes the credibility of the federal program.

For the long term, the federal government must begin the necessary work now to replace the motor fuel tax as the primary source of funding of the Highway Trust Fund. Work must begin in earnest to develop alternate, viable funding sources that can meet the needs of the American transportation network.

## 2. Lead the Country in Combating Oil Dependence and Climate Change

NACTO urges the White House, USDOT and Congress to declare it a national priority to encourage forms of transportation that promote American energy efficiency and independence, and accordingly to foster increased public transit use, ride-sharing, bicycling, walking and efficient goods movement. The dependence of the United States on oil from volatile regions in the world is a glaring national security weakness. Improvements to public transportation, sidewalks, crosswalks, bicycling networks and freight movement and distribution systems will help people and goods get where they need to go with less oil and fewer greenhouse gas emissions. One-quarter of all U.S. household trips are under one mile in distance. Without a transportation authorization that focuses on shifting trips to the most efficient modes, the effects of the 2007 fuel efficiency standards for cars are likely to be swamped by increases in private vehicle travel.

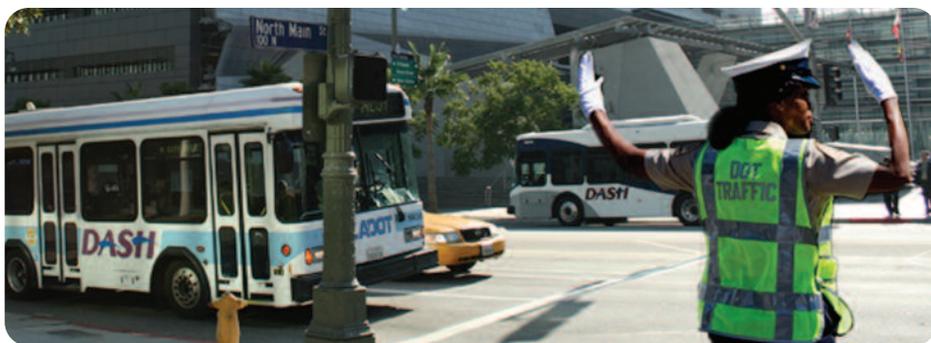
**Recent Changes in Travel:  
Transit Growing, Driving Shrinking**



Source: Traffic Volume Trends (FHWA) and Transit Ridership (American Public Transportation Association)

### Mandate a Better Environment For Walking and Bicycling

Roads that are built as “complete streets” that allow people to drive, walk or bicycle provide crucial options for people to get around. Public transportation also depends on a safe and comfortable walking environment, since most people taking transit walk to and from bus stops and rail stations. The federal program should support improvements to pedestrian and bicycle facilities through dedicated, streamlined funding and a strong mandate.



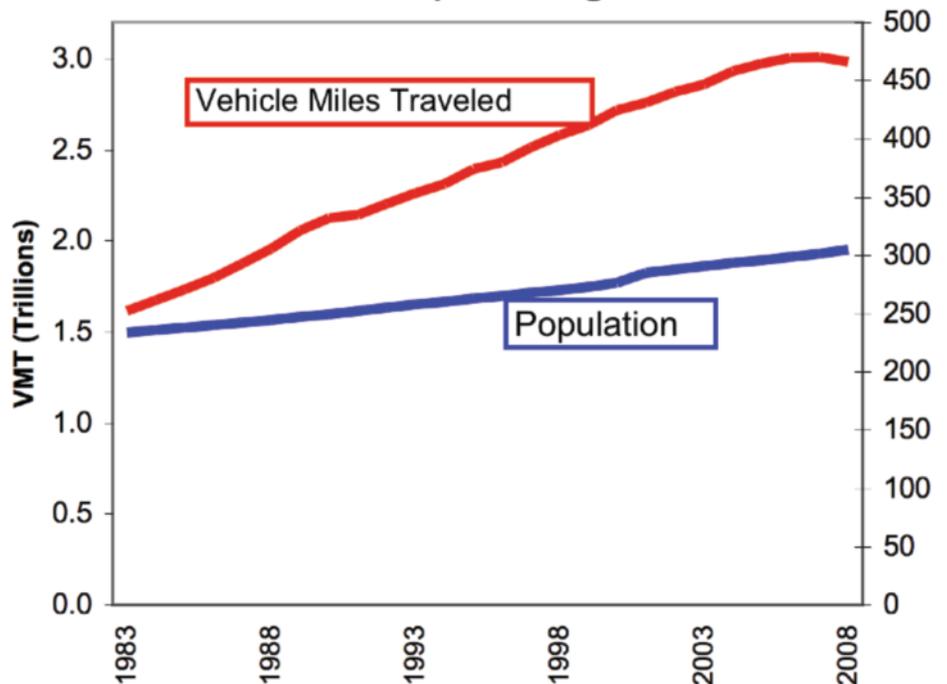
North Main Street, Los Angeles

### Prioritize Mass Transit When Adding Capacity

New highway capacity, which can generate additional VMT and car-dependent sprawl, is generally eligible for a high federal funding share within a variety of straightforward FHWA programs, while new mass transit capacity faces the tortuous FTA New Starts process and receives a much lower federal funding share by comparison. The playing field for new transportation capacity should be leveled by streamlining and better funding transit New Starts, augmenting transit formula funding (to free additional state and local resources for investment in transit capacity) and use of identical federal match shares for new road and transit capacity.

Different forms of new transportation capacity should be considered on a level playing field

25-Year Trend: People Driving More and More



Source: Traffic Volume Trends (FHWA) and U.S. Census Estimates

### Create a Competitive Process for Emissions Goals

The federal government should introduce incentives to foster best practices in reducing transportation-related emissions of greenhouse gases. Cities, counties and states at the forefront of combating climate change should be rewarded to spur innovation.

### Develop Transportation Policies and Funding Strategies that Promote Compact Land Use Development and Infill

Funding of transportation projects that promote more efficient land use development should be a priority. Traffic congestion, often blamed on inadequate transportation systems, is far more often caused by poor land use development. While land use and zoning decisions remain under the authority of local governments, the federal government can play a role by funding transportation projects that support efficient and environmentally friendly land use patterns. Compact development and infill strategies result in increased transit use, congestion mitigation, and better air quality.

Photo Right: Trolley, San Francisco





### 3. Modernize Agency Tools and Structures

One of the most difficult issues facing the modernization of our transportation system is the mismatch between the places with problems and the agencies with funds to address them. Metropolitan areas contain virtually all of the traffic congestion in the U.S., most of the poor air quality areas, and all major freight hubs. But state agencies are still solely responsible for 93 percent of federal highway funding used to address these metropolitan issues.

#### Dramatically Improve Project Delivery

Project planning today often takes far longer than construction. The federal transportation program should improve project delivery without compromising environmental review and protection. This can be done by eliminating redundancies in project review, creating procedures whose goal is project implementation rather than fulfillment of bureaucratic check-lists, requiring state governments to adopt best practices in project review, tracking and accounting and including environmental agencies in the transportation planning process.

#### Direct Aid to Cities

One way big cities can put federal dollars to work faster and more efficiently is a direct-aid relationship between US DOT and city transportation agencies. NACTO member agencies have the same or greater staff capacities and technical expertise as many state transportation departments, yet are subject to the same pass-through procedures as small towns and villages. These processes generally add little or no value to urban projects but invariably add months or years to project delivery. Cities with the capacity and interest should be permitted to opt in to a direct funding relationship with US DOT.

#### Empty the New Starts Pipeline

Metropolitan areas with public transportation expansion plans are currently waiting in a 12-year line that is very likely to lengthen. They are lining up despite the fact that virtually the entire New Starts program requires a local match of 50 percent or more. The program is currently funded at approximately \$1.6 billion per year, as compared to the \$7 billion spent in 2006 on new highway capacity - with just a 20 percent local match. Across the country, metropolitan areas are hungry for new public transportation capacity, and this will only increase as the price of oil climbs.

Large cities have the institutional capacity to receive federal transportation funding directly from US DOT



### Lead a Major Freight Planning and Policy Initiative

Many NACTO cities are major ports of entry to the U.S. for international goods movement, as well as constituting huge consumer markets. A national freight mobility plan should look at alleviating chokepoints, supporting energy efficient modes of freight transport such as rail, barge and ship, and planning for a national system that supports economic development while controlling hot spots for negative impacts of freight movement.

### Raise the Profile of Safety

Safety for all users should be a top priority in roadway projects across the country. While SAFETEA-LU saw an increase in safety funding, it has yet to show significant reductions in the over 42,000 Americans killed annually in traffic crashes. This terrible impact on American families is widespread and profound, but receives very little effective policy attention in proportion to its severity. A large percentage of the federal transportation program should be geared to reward positive outcomes, including steady reductions in transportation-related fatalities and serious injuries.

### Underwrite Innovative Urban Policy

One of the strongest innovative programs from USDOT in recent years is the Urban Partnership Agreement program, which targeted congestion reduction through road pricing and new mass transit initiatives. This sort of financial incentive can leverage projects that chart new directions that might otherwise be difficult to achieve. This federal approach to urban innovation should be continued and expanded.

**Photo Above:** Houston TranStar Transportation Control, Houston  
**Photo Right:** Freight Railroad Grade Crossing, Chicago



## NACTO's Themes for Federal TRANSPORTATION POLICY & U.S. DOT PROGRAM

### A Transportation Policy that Acknowledges Cities

It is long past time for federal transportation policy to reflect the fact that metropolitan areas account for most of the American economy and a majority of its population, and that America's big cities carry tremendous unrealized economic, transportation and environmental potential.

The density of cities can be leveraged into much greater transportation efficiency and workforce mobility, attracting and facilitating economic development and yielding huge environmental benefits for America. We will only realize these benefits and sustain our national economic competitiveness if federal policy

acknowledges and directly addresses the transportation infrastructure and congestion problems facing our cities. The federal bill can support cities by balancing investments across different modes of transportation, supporting innovation, and reinforcing urban vitality and growth.



Crosswalk in Union Square, New York courtesy of Flickr.com: Daniel Jeffries

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