



# Transportation Friday

An electronic newsletter concerning regional transportation issues

Friday, December 6, 2019

Volume 32, Number 9

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[2018 Unified Planning Work Program](#)

[2016-2019 Transportation Improvement Program](#)

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## Contact Us

<http://www.mobilempo.org>  
[transportation@sarpc.org](mailto:transportation@sarpc.org)

Kevin Harrison, PTP

This week *In The News* Cost of Deferred Highway Maintenance and \$1 million for 2020 Census Outreach . In *Legislative Updates*, rural areas set to win big under Trump's transportation plan, Congress Repeals \$7.6B Highway Funding Rescission with a CR until December 20<sup>th</sup>, and in Connecticut, what happens when just truckers are tolled? This week's *Just For Fun* is *Dog Gone Funny*.

Check out [ALGO Traffic](#) before you travel!

[www.mobilempo.org](http://www.mobilempo.org)  Check us out on FACEBOOK

SARPC Transportation Video, this is what we do [HERE](#)

Want to know what other SARPC departments do?

[Planning and Community Development](#)

[Area Agency on Aging](#)

[Employment and Economic Development](#)

Anthony Johnson, Monica Williamson, Tom Piper, and Kevin Harrison, PTP

## Mobile MPO Updates

### **MOBILE AREA TRANSIT SYSTEM FEASIBILITY STUDY is underway**



In August of 2019, a consultant selection committee selected VIA Mobility to perform the study. VIA Mobility has partnered with local group Goodwin, Mills, and Cawood as a sub consultant. The consultants were given notice to proceed last week, and the kick off was last Friday and there was a teleconference this morning. [HERE](#) is Via's presentation from the kick-off.

There is a lot of work to be done in a short amount of time, and if you would like to be part of this study, we are compiling a stakeholders list. Please call Kevin Harrison for details.



Director of  
Transportation  
[kharrison@sarpc.org](mailto:kharrison@sarpc.org)

Tom Piper  
Senior Transportation  
Planner  
[tpiper@sarpc.org](mailto:tpiper@sarpc.org)

Monica Williamson  
Transportation Planner  
[mwilliamson@sarpc.org](mailto:mwilliamson@sarpc.org)

Anthony Johnson  
Transportation Planner  
[ajohnson@sarpc.org](mailto:ajohnson@sarpc.org)

South Alabama  
Regional Planning  
Commission  
110 Beauregard St  
Mobile, Alabama  
36602  
(251) 433-6541

Envision2045  
Invest in your transportation Future  
Mobile, AL Metropolitan Area Long Range Transportation Plan

Envision2045 is multi-modal in scope, encompassing long-range plans for highway, public transportation, and bicycle and pedestrian networks. Regional growth, economic development, and accessibility within the study area along with environmental concerns necessitate that the long-range plan addresses not only improved vehicular travel but also improvements to alternative modes. Preservation of the existing transportation system coupled with enhancement of all modal choices will contribute to the improvement of the overall quality of life in the region.

The South Alabama Regional Planning Commission(SARPC) invites decision makers, stakeholders, and members of the general public to participate in the development of the plan. SARPC is seeking feedback on transportation major infrastructure projects, initiatives and policies. Transportation priorities such as congestion, freight, transit, roadways, bicycle and pedestrian, and other transportation modes will be addressed in the 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan.

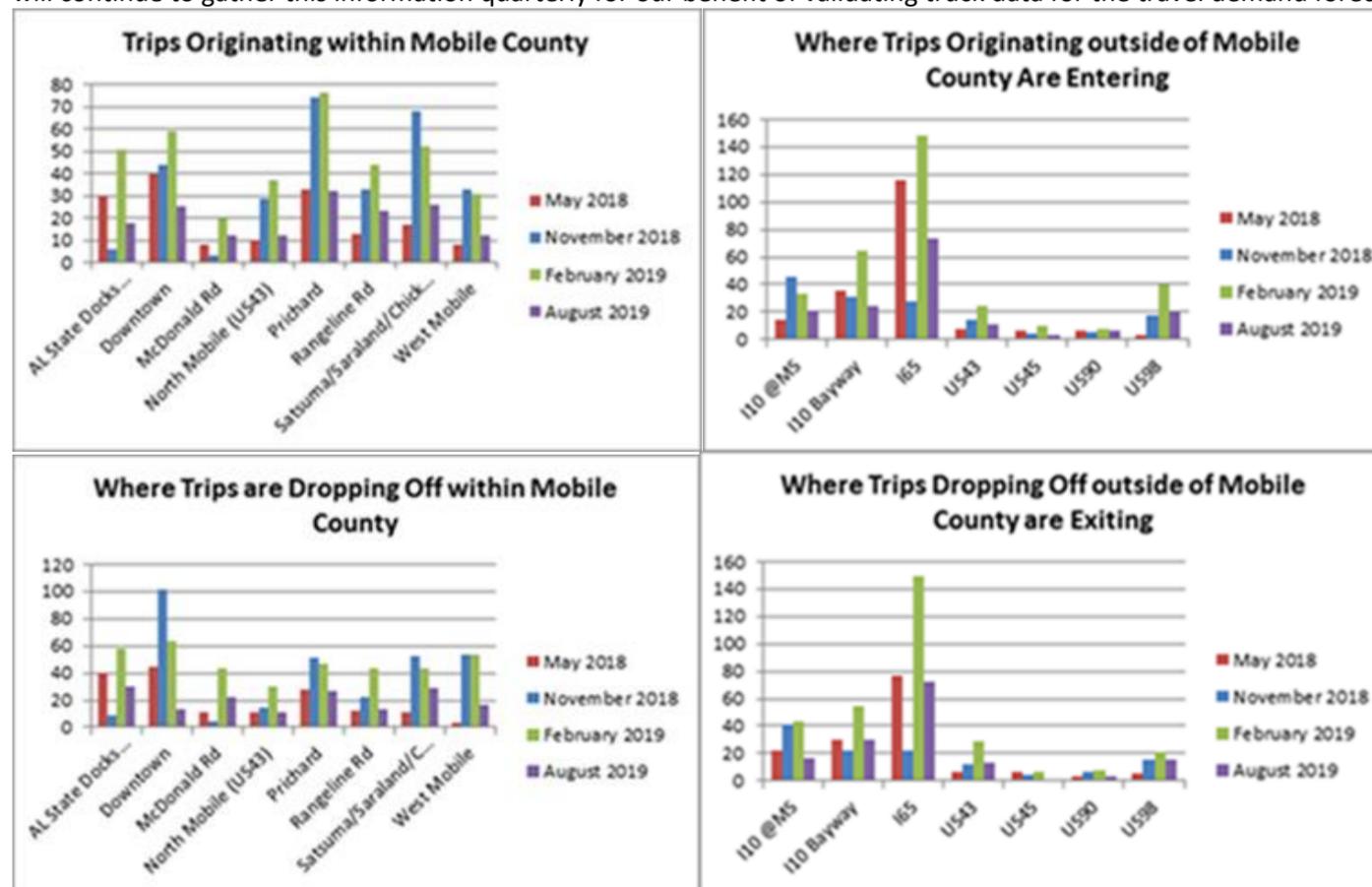
Your comments help SARPC's planners to develop a wide-ranging, action-oriented transportation plan. The Envision2045 plan being developed will also serve as a basis for allocating limited federal money aimed at roadways, bridges, and public transportation facilities. The comment period on the early participation online survey is closed; however, there will be several more opportunities for the public to comment on the plan in the near future.

Please contact Kevin Harrison at [kharrison@sarpc.org](mailto:kharrison@sarpc.org) with any questions or requests for further information.

Preliminary Survey Results have been posted [HERE](#) and will be updated as more of the questions are put into graph and chart form.

## FREIGHT DATA

APM Terminals has provided us with their fourth quarterly survey report. Just as last quarter, for two days APM Terminals had on-board tablets for drivers to answer a series of questions in terms of where they came from and where they are going. APM Terminals will continue to gather this information quarterly for our benefit of validating truck data for the travel demand forecasting model.



## [FY 2020-2023 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM \(TIP\) NOW ONLINE](#)

The TIP represents a four year program (2020-2023) for improvements in the various transportation systems located within the Mobile study area as identified in the Mobile MPO's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), the twenty-five year plan for the Mobile Urban area [Destination 2040](#). The LRTP establishes the transportation programs that are needed to meet travel demand by the study year and study area. LRTP projects that become funded are moved into the TIP and submitted to the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT), where they are programmed into the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). For MPO projects, TIP project selection is based on priorities established by MPO member governments and the availability of funds through the Surface Transportation Attributable program. For other projects, ALDOT has discretion of project funding based on availability of funds from various types of funding categories. Most often, projects in the TIP are derived from the LRTP. The TIP guides ALDOT in its annual allocation of funds for transportation improvements and becomes a part of the STIP.

ArcGIS Online is now being utilized by MPO staff to map all federally funded surface transportation projects within our area. Check it out [HERE](#).

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## Mobile River Bridge and Bayway Project:

<http://mobileriverbridge.com/>

### About the project:

The Mobile River Bridge and Bayway project would reduce congestion on I-10 in South Alabama through the addition of additional capacity: a new six-lane bridge over the Mobile River, full replacement of the existing Bayway with an eight-lane structure, and redevelopment of seven interchanges. The project would run from Virginia Street in Mobile to the US 90/98 interchange in Baldwin County. Information in the project is available at [www.MobileRiverBridge.com](http://www.MobileRiverBridge.com).

The Alabama Department of Transportation on August 28, 2019 ceased project development efforts on the proposed Mobile River Bridge & Bayway.

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## Recent Scheduling Changes This Week for Mobile

The target start date, plan status, or project engineers estimated amount has changed for the following:

Project : 100069060 ( CN )

Federal aid number : IM I010

County : MOBILE

Project Description : RESURFACING ON I-10 FROM .28 MILE WEST OF CAROL PLANTATION ROAD TO .87 MILE EAST OF SR-193

Old Target start date : April 03, 2020

New Target start date : May 29, 2020

Project : 100049566 ( CN )

Federal aid number : BRF 0016 (522)

County : MOBILE

Project Description : REPLACE BRIDGE, BIN 008714, SR-16 (US-90) WESTBOUND OVER TENSAW-SPANISH RIVER. (SUFF=49.7, STATUS=SD)

Old Engineers Estimate : \$29,684,846.00

New Engineers Estimate : \$35,165,856.90

Project : 100069442 ( CN )

Federal aid number : NH 0042 (538)

County : MOBILE

Project Description : INSTALLATION OF NEW GENERATOR TO REPLACE EXISTING GENERATOR FOR BANKHEAD TUNNEL AND ITS DEVICES

Old Engineers Estimate : \$757,500.00

New Engineers Estimate : \$1,099,883.00

Project : 100068297 ( FM )

Federal aid number : NH 0193 (506)

County : MOBILE

Project Description : RESURFACING ON SR-193 FROM SR-163 TO HIGGINS ROAD

Old Engineers Estimate : \$2,849,753.00

New Engineers Estimate : \$2,855,342.65

Project : 100070541 ( FM )

Federal aid number : STPAA 0188 (504)

County : MOBILE

Project Description : RESURFACING ON SR-188 FROM FRANKLIN ROAD TO LAKELAND DRIVE

Old Engineers Estimate : \$1,230,683.00

New Engineers Estimate : \$1,201,584.89

## South Alabama RPO Updates

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### Rural Planning Organization (RPO) Meeting

The South Alabama Regional Planning Commission (SARPC) had a meeting of the Rural Planning Organization (RPO) Committee last Thursday, September 19, 2019 at the Baldwin County Central Annex at 22251 Palmer Street in Robertsdale, Alabama.

Items discussed were current and future transportation projects in the rural areas of our region by the ALDOT Southwest Regional Office.

Other items on the agenda included:

Adoption of the minutes of the previous meeting

- Review and adoption of the Fiscal Year 2020 Work Program (available for review online at <http://www.mobilempo.org/RPODocuments.html>)
- Updating the RPO Transportation Plan with Project List (attached and available for review online at <http://www.mobilempo.org/RPODocuments.html>)

## Projects in Region Let December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019

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### MOBILE COUNTY

None at this time

### BALDWIN COUNTY

- For constructing the Planing, Resurfacing, Steel Blockout Replacement, and Traffic Stripe on SR-59 from the junction of East 29th Avenue to the junction of CR-12 in Foley. Length 5.268 mi. The Bracket Estimate on this project is from \$2,691,921 to \$3,290,125 .
- For constructing the Safety Widening, Planing, Resurfacing, and Traffic Stripe on SR-181 from the junction of SR-42 (US-98) west of Barnwell to just south of the junction of Quail Creek Drive in Fairhope. Length 7.065 mi. The Bracket Estimate on this project is from \$1,486,034 to \$1,816,264

### ESCAMBIA COUNTY

None at this time

[What's Under Construction?](#) [Project Status](#)

## Legislative Updates

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### Rural areas set to win big under Trump's transportation plan for road, rail, and air

by [Paul Bedard](#)

December 02, 2019 07:36 AM

After years of “discrimination” by Washington bureaucrats, rural communities are finally set to get a long-overdue share of federal money for roads, rail, and airports, a key promise of President Trump.

In a major funding shift championed by Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, officials have revealed that rural areas that received 21% of \$7-\$8 billion in infrastructure funds in past years received up to 70% in an early campaign to improve transportation safety and capacity and will get half from now on.

“Rural America is not looking for a handout ... They merely want not to be overlooked or discriminated against and to have their fair share in the distribution of federal resources,” Chao told us about her new program, [Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success](#), or ROUTES.

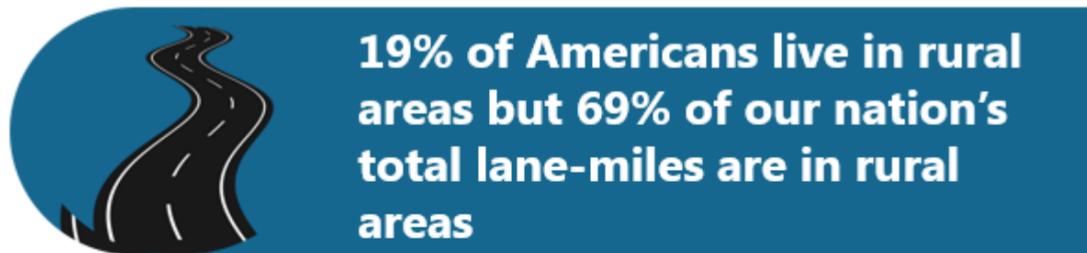
In the less than two months after Chao first talked about it in St. Louis, ROUTES has been embraced by transportation officials around the country as a boost to help increase safety and move goods through small towns.

In Iowa, Transportation Director Mark Lowe said the new funding would be used for road “modernization,” improving bus systems to get workers into urban areas, and even river lock systems to move goods.

In Missouri, Gov. Mike Parson said fixing broken infrastructure is a top focus, and Chao’s plan comes just in time. “Transportation drives our economy, and improving infrastructure is a major step toward maintaining our highway system and ensuring we have the framework for access and expansion in the future. We appreciate Secretary Chao’s continued support and commitment to infrastructure in Missouri,” he said.

ROUTES is winning cheers in Congress, too.

“Almost half of all traffic fatalities in the country occur on rural roads, despite only one-fifth of the U.S. population living in these rural areas. This disproportionately high number is due, in part, to crumbling infrastructure and lack of funds to fix the issues,” said Arkansas Republican Rep. Bruce Westerman.



Department of Transportation officials are highlighting the size of rural infrastructure needing support.

“Secretary Chao’s ROUTES initiative is an important step in recognizing and addressing the need to invest in America’s rural areas,” said Westerman, who has co-authored a legislative package similar to DOT’s, the [Rural Roads Safety Act](#), introduced with Democratic Iowa Rep. Abby Finkenauer.

In Chao’s plan, rural areas will apply for the funding, which a special council will review. Initial rewards from discretionary funds could come as early as next spring.

Chao’s DOT is not telling local communities or states how or where to spend the money. “The federal government is not pushing this on them or telling them what to do,” said a senior Chao adviser.

What’s more, DOT wants to help poor communities unable to come up with the federal project match of 20%. “We’re trying to be nimble,” said the DOT adviser.

Lowe, president of the [Mid-America Association of State Transportation Officials](#), credited DOT with working with states to formulate ROUTES. “They are treating us as a partner,” he said, adding, “It’s not a one-way conversation.” [HERE](#)

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## ***Congress Repeals \$7.6B Highway Funding Rescission***

[editor@ashto.org](mailto:editor@ashto.org) November 22, 2019 0 COMMENTS



A one-month [continuing resolution](#) or CR that extends federal government funding through December 20 also contained a provision that repealed a \$7.6 billion rescission of federal-aid highway contract authority – a cut originally mandated by the 2015 Fixing America’s Surface Transportation or FAST Act to occur next year.

The House of Representatives passed the CR by a vote of 231 to 192 on November 18, followed on November 21 by passage in the Senate by a vote of 74 to 20 on and President Trump's [signature on the measure](#), just hours before a previous CR [signed in September](#) expired.



Photo by WVDOT

“Repealing the highway rescission today was an absolute must,” noted Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W. Va., chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works subcommittee on transportation and infrastructure, [in a statement](#).

“Failure to do so would have resulted in clawing back millions of dollars that states have already contracted out for highway infrastructure projects,” Sen. Capito added. “This entire ordeal is a good lesson, though: Congress must do its job and fully fund programs like this to prevent more budget brinksmanship in the future.”

In the first segment of a new video series on Transportation TV entitled “On Time with Tymon,” Jim Tymon, executive director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, expressed his gratitude to Congress and the President for their bipartisan support in eliminating the \$7.6 billion rescission

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## To fix our infrastructure, Washington needs to start from scratch

Adie Tomer, Joseph W. Kane, and Lara Fishbane December 4, 2019

The 2016 presidential election felt like a watershed moment for federal infrastructure reform. For the first time in decades, both the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates made infrastructure a central component of their platforms. Their proposals reflected years of consistent calls for congressional action from groups representing cities, states, and industries—all of whom welcomed the opportunity to debate their ideas in pursuit of new legislation and agency policy. Optimism and confidence out of Washington was palpable.

Now, just one year away from another presidential election, the federal government is no closer to wholesale infrastructure reform than it was in 2016. What went so wrong?

Unlike many other issues in the capital, politics was not the major obstacle. Infrastructure is famously nonpartisan in Washington, where both sides of the aisle regularly exchange ideas on transportation, water, and broadband policy. At different times over the past three years, House and Senate leadership expressed support for putting infrastructure debates on the legislative calendar.

We would suggest a different culprit. Washington could not deliver reform because Congress and the administration failed to commit to a process to rethink and redesign current law. Key parties agreed to do something, but they never actually debated what that something should be. Three years later, there is still no clarity on what “reform” even means.

To enact genuine reform—legislation that completely reshapes the government’s approach to infrastructure programming, funding, and regulation—federal leaders must be willing to revisit the fundamental goals the country’s infrastructure systems intend to achieve and honestly assess whether current policies share those objectives.

As it stands, current laws reflect a bygone era. Washington’s legacy policies still respond to challenges of a different time, like connecting cities across state lines, delivering telephone and cable service, or stopping sewage dumping. Today’s challenges—the most extreme income and wealth inequality since the Gilded Age, economic divergence caused by digitalization and global trade, the existential pressures of climate change—are different, and our current policies are struggling to address them. [HERE](#)

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### Trucking industry strikes back against ‘trucks only’ tolls plan

Conn. (WTNH) — The Connecticut trucking industry is raising red flags over a ‘trucks only’ tolls plan that Governor Ned Lamont wants state lawmakers to pass as soon as possible.

The ‘Connecticut Motor Transport Association’ points to statistics that show the plan will hurt local businesses the most and that you will end up picking up the tab anyway.

The Governor is asking that transportation/trucks only tolls and several other pending issues be addressed in a Special Legislative Session the week of December 16.

That appears unlikely as the trucking industry strikes back.

Statistics released Wednesday indicate that 62% of the freight in Connecticut travels from place to place within the state and that 'trucks only tolls' will harm the state economy.

The President of the Motor Transport Association, Joe Scully, not convinced that any plan involving tolling trucks would only involve out-of-state trucks, saying, "Let's forget about all this talk about out-of-state trucks. We have some real data showing that it's in-state freight that's going to be hit."

One member of the association who operates a fleet of more than 35 trucks, says he may have to impose a surcharge of \$100 to \$200 dollars on every load if the tolls go in to effect.

Scully adding that the cost will be passed on to the consumers.

*"With truck tolls you're going to be taxing freight while it's on the way to the marketplace and then it will be taxed again when the consumer or the ultimate end user goes to purchase it."*

**– THE PRESIDENT OF THE MOTOR TRANSPORT ASSOCIATION, JOE SCULLY**

The Republican leader in the House, Rep. Themis Klarides (R-Derby) says this is one of the reasons every Republican opposes tolls on anyone, declaring, "This is a 'shell game,' very simple. You are not going to see the charge on your 'E-Z Pass' everyday because you're going to see the charge in the furniture you buy...or the supermarket, everything you do on a daily basis is going to increase."

But the Democratic leader in the Senate, Senate President Pro tem Sen. Martin Looney (D-New Haven) notes that the language they are preparing would specifically give a break to local freight carriers by charging them only one toll per day per bridge.

He also says the 62% local freight statistic reinforces part of the Governor's argument.

Senator Looney saying, "That very statistic does indicate that at least then 38% of the trucks are coming from out of state currently pay nothing."

The Governor's official spokesman releasing a statement Wednesday rebutting Sculley's suggestions.

*"The Lamont administration is going to heed the advice of some of the most important and influential employers in the state when it comes to the decision to invest in Connecticut's infrastructure."*

*Reducing traffic and improving public transit are the investments that will grow Connecticut's economy, making our state a better place for business.*

*Trucks lead to more damage on highways, and the amount of congestion due to under-investment leads to reduced productivity, which is bad for business. The worst decision the state could make would be to leave things as they are, which is apparently what Mr. Sculley is suggesting.*

*Further, there is no evidence that suggests charging vehicles to transport goods leads to higher prices. Texas, Illinois, Florida, New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Maine all have tolls, does that mean that everything transported to, and then consumed in those states is more expensive? The argument is a fallacy."*

**– MAX REISS, COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF GOVERNOR NED LAMONT [HERE](#)**

## Funding Opportunities

### U.S. Department of Transportation Announces Funding Opportunity for Roadway Safety Tools

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation today published a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) to build the capacity of state, local, and tribal governments to use innovative data tools and information to improve roadway safety.

"This is part of the Department's ongoing effort to utilize predictive data analytics to identify and address systemic factors contributing to crashes and improve roadway safety in communities across America," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Elaine L. Chao.

The NOFO is an important step in the Department's [Safety Data Initiative](#), which helps communities devise policies to reduce roadway fatalities. This funding opportunity makes available up to \$3 million to develop, refine, and deploy safety tools that address specific roadway safety problems. The Department anticipates making awards of \$250,000 to \$500,000 to each successful applicant.

Eligible applicants are state or local governments, metropolitan planning organizations and regional governments, other political subdivisions of a state or local government, and tribal governments. The funding complements existing safety data improvement

programs at the Federal Highway Administration, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration by focusing on improving data tools practitioners use to inform their policy and decision-making.

The NOFO is available on grants.gov at: <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppld=322472>

On December 3, 2019 at 2:30 PM ET, the Department will hold a webinar to provide an overview of this funding opportunity. Information about registering for the webinar is available on the Department's [Safety Data Initiative](#) webpages.

Applications are due by January 17, 2019 at 3:00 PM ET.

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### **FTA Mobility Program**

*Applications due by January 6, 2020.*

Following Transportation Secretary Elaine L. Chao's recent [announcement](#) to fund new programs to develop and deploy innovations in technology to improve access and mobility, FTA published a [notice of funding](#) for the [Mobility for All Pilot Program](#), which seeks to improve mobility options and access to community services for older adults, individuals with disabilities, and people with low incomes.

The \$3.5 million grants program will fund projects that enhance transportation connections to jobs, education and health services. A complete list of members and related contact information by clicking [here](#).

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### **Opportunity Zones**

EDA's Opportunity Zone Web Page

EDA now has an [EDA Opportunity Zone Web page](#) for economic development stakeholders and others to use as a resource to further help foster job creation and attract private investment to support development in economically distressed areas across the United States.

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### **Section 5307, 5310, and 5311: Using Non-DOT Funds for Local Match**

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) [Administration for Community Living](#) (ACL) has worked with the [National Aging and Disability Transportation Center](#) to clarify the ability of grantees to use Older Americans Act Title IIIB Supportive Services Funds to match Federal Transit Administration (FTA) programs. These FTA programs include Urbanized Area Formula Grants (Section 5307), Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and People with Disabilities (Section 5310), and Formula Grants for Rural Areas (Section 5311). This information has been publicized [HERE](#)

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To stay up to date on all of the many grants that are available visit [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov).

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## **Just For Fun** (THIS IS SATIRE, AND JUST FOR FUN)

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### **Dog Gone Funny....**

Last week in Florida, a dog accidentally put a car in gear, and drove it around for an hour, in circles. The only damage was a mailbox. [HERE](#) is the video. The dog and the family, and the neighborhood are lucky that nobody was hurt. Earlier this year, a pro angler was pulling his boat out of the water, when the dog accidentally knocked the vehicle into reverse, and just about sunk the RV that was pulling the boat out of the water [HERE](#).



Most of the staff here has a family dog, and having a dog in the car can be very dangerous. But do we really want to “teach” our dogs how to drive? This guy did..... [HERE](#)



## In the News

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### **Gov. Ivey awards \$1 million for 2020 Census outreach**

Governor Kay Ivey on Monday announced that she has awarded \$1 million to support efforts to promote, educate and encourage participation among Alabamians in the 2020 Census.

The funds provided by the Legislature will go to 34 government agencies and organizations for programs to increase Alabama’s self-response rate during the 2020 Census this spring.

“I cannot emphasize enough the importance of what a full and accurate count in the 2020 Census means for Alabama. Those numbers have a direct impact on billions of dollars in funding that affect schools, community programs, health care, job opportunities and just about every other aspect of our state,” Gov. Ivey said. “I thank our legislators for allocating funds for these outreach efforts, and I also commend local leaders and organizations for being proactive in these efforts.”

The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs is administering the grants from funding allocated by the Legislature in the 2019-2020 Education Trust Fund Budget. ADECA acts as the state’s liaison to the U.S. Census Bureau and the lead state agency for 2020 Census outreach and preparation. The agency is leading Gov. Ivey’s Alabama Counts initiative to ensure a maximum count in the 2020 Census which begins in mid-March 2020 when every Alabama household address will receive an invitation to respond to the census. More information is available at [www.census.alabama.gov](http://www.census.alabama.gov).

“Governor Ivey is absolutely correct about how important an accurate count is for Alabama, and thanks to the Legislature, ADECA is able to partner with entities across the state for education and outreach efforts to ensure that Alabama gets its fair share of funding and to help ensure fair representation for the state in the U.S. House of Representatives,” ADECA Director Kenneth Boswell said.

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## **U.S. Secretary of Transportation Elaine L. Chao Codifies Reforms in New Departmental Rulemaking Process**

WASHINGTON – U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Secretary Elaine L. Chao today announced a final rule codifying a series of important reforms to the Department’s rulemaking, guidance, and enforcement practices. The rule enhances transparency in how the Department issues rules and guidance documents, as well as strengthens due process in DOT enforcement actions.

“When rules are outdated, duplicative, overly complex and contradictory, they harm the cause of safety and effectiveness. This effort enhances the department’s regulatory process by providing greater transparency and strengthening due process in enforcement actions,” said U.S. Secretary of Transportation Elaine L. Chao.

DOT is leading the way in reforming not just individual regulations, but the process by which we regulate. This “rule on rules” is an example of the type of good government embraced by this Administration. It will continue to aid the Department in promoting clear and effective engagements with all those who are impacted by DOT’s regulations, which touch on all forms of transportation.

Since January 2017, DOT has saved \$3.68 billion in regulatory costs to the economy and U.S. consumers, and has far exceeded the President’s 2-for-1 plan. At its peak, DOT was issuing 23 deregulatory actions for every new significant regulatory action. DOT continues to maintain the largest number of deregulatory actions in the Unified Agenda of any department or agency.

The rule’s major components include permanently incorporating the Trump Administration’s regulatory reform policies on regulatory budgeting, the “2-for-1” plan, and the Regulatory Reform Task Force. The Rule will codify additional procedures for the issuance of the Department’s most costly rules, including enhanced opportunities for public participation. The rule clarifies that the Department’s guidance documents do not impose legal obligations and shall not be used as a basis for enforcement. It also ensures due process protections for potential subjects of enforcement actions, including open and fair investigations and proceedings.

More information can be found here: [www.transportation.gov/regulations/administrative-rulemaking-guidance-and-enforcement-procedures](http://www.transportation.gov/regulations/administrative-rulemaking-guidance-and-enforcement-procedures)

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## **Enhance Freight Connectivity in Next Highway Bill, Executives Tell US House Panel**

Eugene Mulero | Staff Reporter  
December 5, 2019

Consideration in Congress of an extensive update to federal transportation guidelines must prioritize sustainable funding that enhances freight connectivity and reduces congestion, industry stakeholders told lawmakers on Capitol Hill on Dec. 5.

Absent proposals in the next comprehensive highway bill that target improving the nation’s infrastructure, freight mobility could experience disruptions, executives representing freight rail, state transportation agencies and prominent sectors warned members on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. Online consumer spending and a growing population are contributing factors to congestion across metropolitan regions, they asserted.

“Our nation’s ability to move goods safely, reliably and expeditiously keeps U.S. businesses competitive in the global marketplace and supports a higher standard of living for all,” said Erin Aleman, executive director of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. She represented the Coalition for America’s Gateways and Trade Corridors. “I urge you to make a robust freight program the hallmark of this upcoming reauthorization.”

Jim Tymon with the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials proposed lawmakers consider expanding the Primary Highway Freight System and National Multimodal Freight Network in the next major highway bill.

“Since states are required to complete state freight plans, which must then be approved by [the U.S. Department of Transportation], a framework exists to identify and define the appropriate freight network in any given state,” he said.

Tymon also urged lawmakers to guarantee the long-term solvency of the dwindling Highway Trust Fund, an account that assists states with projects. The fund falls under the jurisdiction of the congressional tax-writing committees, which have yet to propose fixes to the account.

“The lack of stable, predictable funding from the Highway Trust Fund makes it nearly impossible for state [departments of transportation] to plan for large projects that need a reliable flow of funding over multiple years. And these projects are what connect people, enhance quality of life and stimulate economic growth in each community where they are built,” Tymon added.

To that point, Ian Jefferies, CEO of the Association of American Railroads, also called for an assurance of sustainability for the trust fund. AAR opposes increasing taxes or fees on freight railroads pertaining to the fund. Instead, the group pointed to increasing the fuel tax, a fee on miles traveled via vehicles or a weight-distance tax.

“The freight railroad industry supports funding for grant programs that enable the public sector, including state and local governments and passenger and commuter railroads, to partner with freight railroads to advance projects of mutual interest, including projects to help lessen road and port congestion, enhance safety at highway-rail grade crossings, improve port connectivity, facilitate intercity passenger and commuter rail service, and improve the quality of life for communities,” Jefferies said.

Additionally, Chuck Baker, president of the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association, expressed support for a freight-centric grants program established in the 2015 FAST Act. “There is value in a merit-based discretionary grant program open to multiple modes of transportation, especially one that is focused on freight and goods movement,” Baker said.

Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) acknowledged a need to enhance connectivity across freight systems and signaled potential for proposing additional funding availability for freight projects. He described freight-centric programs established by the FAST Act as “dramatically oversubscribed.”

“This points to a significant need for greater funding to be made available for freight projects,” DeFazio said. “It also underscores that Congress needs to enact tighter rules around grant allocations to ensure the most worthy projects are funded, which I intend to look at in reauthorization.”

Agreeing on a sustainable source of funding for highway programs remains a challenge for federal lawmakers. The trust fund relies on insufficient revenue from the federal tax on gas (18.4 cents per gallon) and diesel (24.4 cents per gallon). Those rates were set in 1993.

To help address freight concerns nationwide, the U.S. Department of Transportation established the Infrastructure For Rebuilding America, or INFRA, grants program.

Also at the hearing, California Rep. Doug LaMalfa (R) drew attention to legislation he is sponsoring that would repeal the 12% federal excise tax on certain heavy-duty trucks, tractors and trailers. On average, the excise tax at the federal level has the potential to add \$12,000 to \$22,000 to the sale of a new truck, explain supporters of the bill.

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## **USDOT proposes nationwide adoption of highway-rail grade crossing action plans**

BY [CHRIS GALFORD](#) | DECEMBER 4, 2019

In an effort to improve safety at highway-rail grade crossings, the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) recently published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) that would require all states and the District of Columbia to implement crossing action plans.

Those plans would need to be developed and implemented within one year of the final rule’s effective date. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) would then review these plans and, upon finding them sufficient, would publish the plans online.

“Grade crossing collisions are the second leading cause of rail-related deaths in America, but nearly every one of them is preventable,” FRA Administrator Ronald Batory said. “The action plans provide states a tool to engage with federal and local partners, railroads, and rail safety advocates to identify high-risk crossings and develop strategies to save lives.”

U.S. Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao announced the third edition of the Highway-Rail Crossing Handbook, marking the first update to that rulebook in more than a decade. It tracks best practices and new safety standards for the 130,000 public rail and road junctures in use across the country, with a focus on the physical and operational improvements that could help enhance safety measures at these intersections.

“The Department is committed to supporting infrastructure improvements, new communications tools, and working to change driver behavior so that highway-rail grade crossings are safe environments for all transportation users,” Chao said.

All of this comes on the heels of the fourth annual USDOT safety campaign targeting such crossings: Stop. Trains Can’t. This year’s campaign focused on cities with the highest vehicle and train incidents in the past 10 years.

Comments on the proposed new rule will be accepted until Jan. 6, 2020.

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## **Cost of deferred maintenance for U.S. infrastructure tops \$1 trillion, new report finds**

BY [LIZ CAREY](#) | NOVEMBER 21, 2019

A new report from the non-profit Volcker Alliance warns that repairs to the nation’s aging infrastructure could cost more than \$1 trillion, or 5 percent of the country’s gross domestic product, a figure that represents the United States’ deferred maintenance costs for its roads, highways and other critical public assets.

The report entitled, "[America's Trillion-Dollar Repair Bill: Capital Budgeting and the Disclosure of State Infrastructure Needs](#)," unveiled on Nov. 20, outlines how state and local governments do not fully disclose the costs of deferred maintenance to their infrastructure.

"States say their budgets are balanced but too frequently, they fail to account properly for the immense cost of infrastructure maintenance that has been deferred," said William Glasgall, Volcker Alliance senior vice president and director of state and local initiatives. "You cannot make a truly balanced budget if you do not know what your costs are. Taxpayers deserve to know how much it will cost to repair our deteriorating infrastructure."

State and local governments provide about 80 percent of U.S. public infrastructure investment, the report said, adding that infrastructure spending as a share of GDP has declined in recent decades.

According to the report, only four states disclose the cost of deferred maintenance for unfunded capital projects in their state documents. In Tennessee, New Jersey, Michigan and the District of Columbia, researchers found federal reports that showed the deferred maintenance gap, said Camila Fonseca-Sarmiento, one of the paper's authors. In three other states, Hawaii, Kentucky and Washington, university research outlined the costs of deferred maintenance.

Those reports were handled by a separate commission to specifically identify those costs, said Fonseca-Sarmiento, who is with the Institute for Urban and Regional Infrastructure Finance at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota. In some cases, such as in Tennessee and D.C., the commission created a database that listed all of the assets in the state or district, and their condition. According to those reports, between 60 to 70 percent of repairs or maintenance to their infrastructure remain unfunded.

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## **MOWA Choctaw Indians seeking federal recognition once again**

Posted by [Jason Johnson](#) | Dec 4, 2019

The Mobile County Commission has officially endorsed the latest efforts of the MOWA Band of Choctaw Indians to become a federally recognized Native American tribe — marking off one item from a long to-do list for tribal leaders who say federal recognition would bring more resources to members.

Named for its position between Mobile and Washington counties, the MOWA Choctaw Reservation sits on 300 acres near McIntosh, Mount Vernon and Citronelle. The tribe was recognized as a sovereign government by the state of Alabama in 1979, but despite several previous efforts, the tribe's members have not been able to gain federal recognition and reap the benefits that come with that designation.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), recognized tribes are eligible for federal funding and services, but they are also possess certain inherent rights to self-government through treaties with the U.S. That type of "tribal sovereignty" is also what allows the federally recognized Poarch Band of Creek Indians in Atmore to bypass Alabama's prohibitive gambling laws and operate certain types of gaming operations on lands held in trust by the government.

Former U.S. Rep. Joe Bonner introduced a bill in 2012 that would have officially recognized the MOWA tribe, but it died in committee and never made it to the House floor. Other efforts to gain recognition through the BIA have also proved to be unsuccessful dating back as far as 1988.

However, Tribal Chief Lebaron Byrd said the MOWAs tribal council has recently been working with U.S. Rep. Bradley Byrne and Sen. Richard Shelby to get another congressional bill introduced.

"The biggest benefits for us would come from grants that, right now, only federally recognized tribes are able to apply for, and it would also give us a better opportunity to provide health benefits for our members," Byrd said. "Federal tribes get dollars to operate clinics, hospitals and things like that, which tribal members can attend, and they tend to have better health facilities than we do."

Byrd said federal grants for housing and education are also more accessible to federal tribes, though he did note the MOWA Indians are one of the only non-recognized tribes that receive federal funding through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program and Community Service Block Grants.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has also awarded the MOWA tribe \$519,474 through its Indian Housing Block Grant program in the past. Byrd said he doesn't believe it would be much of a stretch for the MOWAs to become fully recognized by the same government.

Speaking to Lagniappe, Byrd didn't focus on whether the tribe would seek to establish some type of gaming or electronic bingo operation were it to become federally recognized. However, he didn't rule the option out, either.

"If it came down to it, and we needed it, I wouldn't say we would not apply for gaming using the sovereignty of a federally recognized tribe, but we're looking at more of the impact federal recognition would have on our tribal members and the services they could receive," Byrd said. "Gaming, if it were to happen, would be just an additional avenue to bring in more resources for the tribe."

In 2013, before Byrd was elected chief, the tribe opened the short-lived Choctaw Entertainment Center in Mount Vernon, but it was quickly shut down by state officials who claimed the center was operating illegal electronic bingo machines. All 50 machines were seized along with more than \$10,090.

After four years in legal limbo, a Mobile County Circuit Court Judge ruled against the tribe — sending the money to the state’s general fund and ordering that the electronic bingo machines be destroyed.

Byrd said the tribe rekindled its interest in gaining federal recognition after Congress approved a bipartisan bill recognizing six tribes in Virginia in 2017. That bill recognized the Chickahominy, the Eastern Chickahominy, the Upper Mattaponi, the Rappahannock, the Monacan and the Nansemond tribes and ended a nearly 20-year effort to obtain federal funds for their 4,400 combined members.

“They had also been denied federal recognition through the Office of Federal Acknowledgement, and we said, ‘if Virginia can do that with six tribes, we’re going to work on trying to get our tribe recognized,’” Byrd said. “Right now we’re trying to gain support like what the Mobile County Commission just did, which they haven’t done in the past. That’s one of the ways we’re going to show that we’re still here.”

The resolution of support unanimously approved by Mobile County Commissioners last month noted that the tribe’s members have preserved their cultural identity as Native Americans and continue to have a high proportion of Choctaw speakers. It also said the MOWAs have made and continue to make “substantial contributions to the culture and history of Mobile County.”

Commission President Jerry Carl, who is also running for Alabama’s District 1 congressional seat, said he listened to the MOWAs concerns wearing two hats. He gave his support from the tribe’s current efforts as a commissioner, but said he’s also looked into what hat might mean if he’s elected to Congress.

“They explained that they had, in the past, tried to get a congressional bill up there recognizing them and haven’t been able to,” Carl said. “I’ve been looking into it, should I be elected. Obviously, I’m still trying to learn what all there is to that before I step in to it too far.”

Lagniappe reached out to Rep. Bradley Byrne’s office asking about the MOWAs’ efforts but did not receive a response as of this publications press deadline.

## Transportation Research

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### **FHWA Webinar Announcement:**

#### **USLIMITS2: A Tool to Aid Practitioners in Determining Appropriate Speed Limits**

You are invited to register for this free webinar, sponsored by FHWA, about the USLIMITS2 speed setting tool. USLIMITS2 is a web based tool designed to help practitioners set reasonable, safe, and consistent speed limits for specific segments of roads. USLIMITS2 is applicable to all types of roads ranging from rural local roads and residential streets to urban freeways. However, the tool is not applicable to school zones or construction zones.

**When:** December 11, 2019

**Time:** 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm ET/11:00 am – 12:30 pm PT

**Registration:** <https://collaboration.fhwa.dot.gov/dot/fhwa/WC/Lists/Seminars/DispForm.aspx?ID=2212> You must register in advance in order to attend this webinar. Space is limited so please register as soon as possible. Once you register you will receive an email with login instructions. Non-USDOT employees must have an FHWA external collaboration account to register. If you do not have an account please visit <https://collaboration.fhwa.dot.gov/FBA/MembershipRequest.aspx> to request one. Once you receive your account confirmation you can then register through the registration link above.

**Description:** This webinar will begin with an overview of USLIMITS2, how it works, the decision rules behind the tool that lead to the speed limit recommendations, recent updates made to the tool, and plans for future updates. This presentation will be followed by presentations from a local agency and a State agency discussing how they have used USLIMITS2 and the benefits that have been recognized.

Presentations:

- USLIMITS2: An Overview presented by Doug Cobb, PE, PTOE, RS1, Transportation Operations and Safety Lead, Toxcel
- The City of Maryland Heights, Missouri’s Experience with USLIMITS2, by Debbie Wright, PE, Engineer II, City of Maryland Heights Department of Public Works
- The Connecticut Department of Transportation’s Experience with USLIMITS2, by Eamon Flannery, EIT, Transportation Engineer III, Connecticut Department of Transportation

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### **Aspen Institute Releases Rural Development Research**

Posted on: November 20th, 2019 by [Carrie Kissel](#)

The [Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group](#) has released the new research report [Rural Development Hubs: Strengthening America's Rural Innovation Infrastructure](#). The report is drawn from interviews with 43 rural development practitioners to address what works to address community and economic development in rural America. The report focuses on the roles of intermediaries, called Rural Development Hubs in the report, that operate on a regional level to improve assets, increase local ownership and control of assets, and address equity and inclusion. NADO member Region Five Development Commission was one of the organizations featured in the report. Learn more at [www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/rural-development-hubs-report](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/rural-development-hubs-report).

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## 2020 Alabama Recreational Trails Conference

SAVE THE DATE

February 5-7, 2020  
Gulf State Park and Lodge  
21196 E Beach Blvd., Gulf Shores, AL 36542

A fun and informative event with mobile workshops and speakers from across Alabama and the United States presenting sessions on the latest trends and ideas in creating recreational trails that are inclusive, accessible, and connected to enhance quality of life and economic development in our state!

Registration announcement coming soon!

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## RURAL ROADWAY DEPARTURE WEBINAR ON 12/12

Rural Roadway Departure Webinar on 12/12

On December 12, 1 – 2:30 p.m., the Federal Highway Administration will present the webinar Reducing Rural Road Departures. Overall, one third of all traffic fatalities are caused by rural roadway departures. Using data-driven systemic analysis, local and tribal agencies can target problem areas in their rural roadway networks. By implementing targeted safety improvements, local and tribal agencies can improve roadway safety and save lives! This webinar will be useful to staff of local government agencies and the regional rural transportation planners who often work with them. Register for the free webinar [here](#).

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## Transportation Dictionary

The USDOT released a searchable online dictionary that includes over 9,000 transportation terms and acronyms. The terms were collected from a variety of public and private transportation publications and databases. This dictionary presents over 9,000 terms and acronyms related to transportation. The terms and acronyms were obtained from various transportation publications and databases which exist within the federal government, private organizations, Canada and Mexico.

### Search Tips

- Sources are listed in parenthesis after the definition.
- None of the searches are case sensitive. Searching for PEDESTRIAN will produce the same results as searching for pedestrian.
- The Dictionary searches for the word, phrase or acronym as it is entered and returns all records that match or contain that word, phrase or acronym. For example, searching for pedestrian will return records for pedestrian and pedestrian walkway.

Click [HERE](#) for the search engine.