



# Transportation Friday

An electronic newsletter concerning regional transportation issues

Friday, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Volume 36, Number 11

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The Mobile County Commission has selected Commissioner Connie Hudson to serve on the Mobile MPO, and how is COVID affecting our travel? please see *Mobile MPO Updates*. Reform is needed in Surface Transportation Funding, Biden selected a new Transportation Secretary, and President Trump signs a short-term spending bill, preventing shutdown this week in *Legislative Updates*. BRATS offers an "on-demand" app, and construction takes a hit because of COVID, *InThe News*. This week's *Just For Fun* is **heart thumping, earth shattering...**

This is the last *Transportation Friday E-Newsletter* of the year; we will resume again in year 2021. Please have a Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year!

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

### New MPO Members

The Mobile MPO has new members:

Mobile County Commissioner, Hon. Connie Hudson  
Councilman, City of Prichard Hon. George McCall, Jr.  
Mayor, City of Chickasaw- Hon. Barry Broadhead  
Mayor, City of Satsuma- Hon. Mark Barlow  
Mayor, City of Creola- Hon. Don Nelson  
Mayor, City of Bayou La Batre- Hon. Henry Barnes, Sr.  
Mayor, City of Semmes- Hon. Brandon Vanhook

From 12/14/20 Mobile County Commission Agenda: "Appointment of Commissioner Connie Hudson as a member of the Mobile Metropolitan Planning Organization effective immediately, her term expiring on March 14, 2022, at which time Commissioner Randall Dueitt shall be appointed to replace her as the Mobile County MPO representative, his term expiring July 10, 2023, to be followed by Commissioner Merceria Ludgood whose term will begin July 10, 2023 and will expire November 13, 2024

### Alabama Legislative Roadshow a Resounding Success

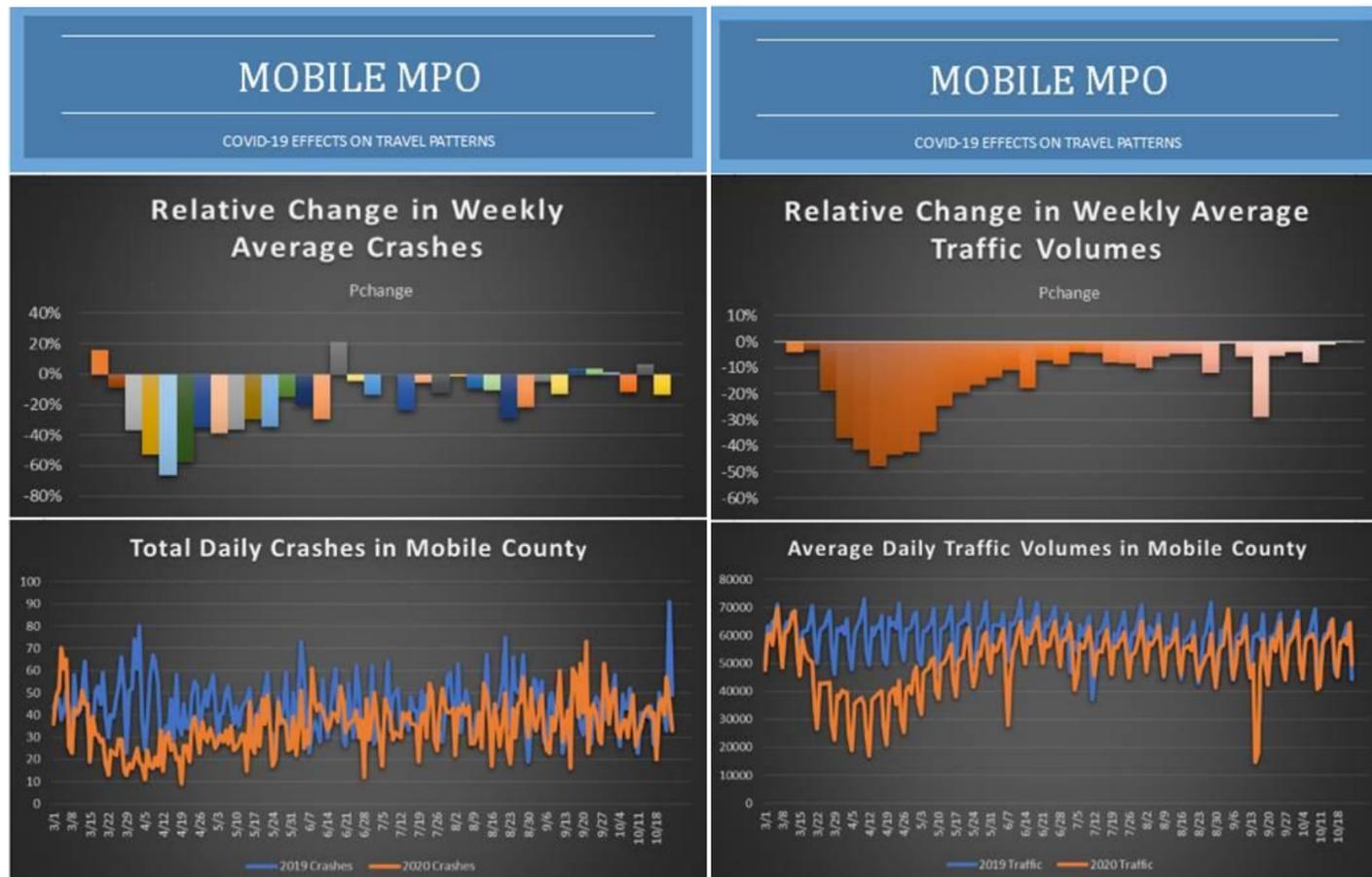
Last week was the Alabama Roadshow, a creation of Representative Margie Wilcox, and the Joint Transportation Committee (JTC). Representative Wilcox is the current chairperson of the JTC for the Alabama House and Senate. This is the first time that the staff members of MPOs and RPOs of the state of Alabama have had the opportunity to interact with all of the legislators within their ALDOT region at one time. This was a well-received event throughout Alabama and everybody learned from it. The first day represented the North Region of ALDOT and was held on Monday in Arab, Alabama. The second day was held in Jacksonville at Jacksonville State University in the VIP section of the stadium. The third day was West Central Region held in Tuscaloosa with a tour of the Alabama Transportation Institute, and Thursday was the Southwest region held in Mobile at the International Trade Club, with a tour of the I-10 Wallace tunnels. The fifth day of the Alabama roadshow was in Auburn, with a tour of the new Advanced Structural Engineering Laboratory, for the South East region of ALDOT. All MPOs and RPOs presented, as well as Kevin Harrison presenting on MPOs, RPOs, LRTP, TIP and the STIP for the Alabama Transportation Planners Association. There was a trivia game that the legislators had fun with, and a poster session for one on one conversations with the MPOs and RPOs. Thank you to Chairperson Wilcox; your forethought into this event came from your experience of 30+ years with the Mobile MPO. For her efforts, Representative Margie Wilcox was named an honorary member of the Alabama Transportation Planner's Association.

Alabama Roadshow Dream Team:



Mike Kaczorowski, Kevin Harrison, JTC Chair / Rep. Margie Wilcox, Scott Tillman

SARPC staff have been working on statistics concerning how COVID-19 has affected travel patterns in the Mobile Urbanized area. For information on these statistics and travel patterns please contact [ajohnson@sarpc.org](mailto:ajohnson@sarpc.org)



### **ENVISION 2045 IS THE LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN (LRTP)**

The LRTP is multimodal in scope, and is based on public input, and a travel demand forecast model. In 2019, an online survey was conducted with almost 150 respondents. Questions ranged from where is the worst congestion, what roads need improvements, problems with the transit systems, etc. There were a lot of comments about the I-10 Mobile River Bridge and the potential for tolls. Prior to the online survey, staff also conducted a South Alabama Freight Forum, which was an opportunity to hear from large manufacturers and trucking companies, to find out what the top issues are concerning the movement of freight in South Alabama. The Bicycle / Pedestrian plan was updated, and the public transit section was authored by the Wave Transit, less the Demand Response Transit Study. The Climate Change element, or Extreme Event Planning, remained almost unchanged from *Destination 2040* LRTP.

The LRTP *Envision 2045* was adopted by the Mobile Metropolitan Planning Organization on April 22, 2020.

More information on the new plan can be found at <https://www.envision2045.org/>

### **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. 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](#).

## Recent Scheduling Changes This Week for Mobile

Project : 100071128 ( FM )

Federal aid number : NH-HSIP 0016 (529)

County : MOBILE

Project Description : RESURFACING AND STEEL BLOCKOUT REPLACEMENT ON SR-16 (US-90) FROM LAWRENCE STREET TO WATER STREET AND TELEGRAPH ROAD

Old Engineers Estimate : \$658,258.00

New Engineers Estimate : \$732,378.98

## South Alabama RPO Updates

The South Alabama Regional Planning Commission (SARPC) met in October using the GoToMeeting app. The agenda included:

- Adoption of the minutes of the previous meeting (these will be sent out soon)
- Review and adoption of the **Fiscal Year 2021 Work Program** (available for review online at:  
<http://mobilempo.org/RPO/RPO%20Documents/2021%20Documents/Draft%20FY%202021%20RPO%20Work%20Program.pdf>)
- Review and adoption of the **Fiscal Years 2020-2023 Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan** (available for review online at:  
<http://mobilempo.org/Documents/Planning/FY2021/2020-2023%20HSCTP%20for%20SARPC.pdf>)

The RPO Transportation Plan Project List (available for review online at <http://www.mobilempo.org/RPODocuments.html>) SARPC Rural Planning Organization

## Projects in Region Let December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020

### MOBILE COUNTY

- For constructing the Planing, Resurfacing, Guardrail Steel Blockout Replacement, and Traffic Stripe on SR-16 (US-90) from 0.340 mile east of the Cochrane Bridge to 0.360 mile west of the Tensaw River Bridge in Mobile. Length 2.935 mi. The Bracket Estimate on this project is from \$2,051,743 to \$2,507,686 .
- For constructing the Planing, Resurfacing, and Traffic Stripe on SR-188 from MP 4.640 to the junction of the Bayou La Batre - Irvington Highway in Bayou La Batre. Length 3.845 mi. The Bracket Estimate on this project is from \$738,956 to \$903,169.

### BALDWIN COUNTY

- For constructing the Planing, Resurfacing, and Traffic Stripe on SR-182 from the West City Limits of Orange Beach to the Perdido Pass Bridge. Length 3.283 mi. The Bracket Estimate on this project is from \$1,476,709 to \$1,804,866.
- For constructing the Micro-Milling, Resurfacing, and Traffic Stripe on SR-180 from a point near the Fort Morgan Historical Site (MP 0.000) to the junction of SR-59 in Gulf Shores. Length 20.779 mi. The Bracket Estimate on this project is from \$2,197,622 to \$2,685,982 .

### ESCAMBIA COUNTY

None at this time

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

## Legislative Updates

### Joe Biden selects Pete Buttigieg as Transportation secretary

[Thomas Franck](#) DEC 17 2020

#### KEY POINTS

- President-elect Joe Biden has chosen former mayor of South Bend Pete Buttigieg to be his Transportation secretary.
- Buttigieg is expected to play a central role in the incoming president's plans to restore and repair roads and bridges throughout the U.S.
- Buttigieg, 38, quickly became a household name during the 2020 elections as a younger, yet still moderate option for Democrats.

President-elect Joe Biden said Tuesday he has chosen former South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg to be his Transportation secretary.  
Bottom of Form

"South Bend was once called one of America's 'dying cities.' Today, it's a hub of innovation and job growth. Mayor Pete Buttigieg led that resurgence, and has been nominated by the President-elect to continue that work as Transportation Secretary," the Biden-Harris Presidential Transition team said on Twitter.

Buttigieg, who was an opponent of Biden's during the 2020 primary elections, is expected to play a central role in the incoming president's plans to restore and repair roads and bridges throughout the U.S.

"This is a moment of tremendous opportunity—to create jobs, meet the climate challenge, and enhance equity for all," Buttigieg tweeted. "I'm honored that the President-elect has asked me to serve our nation as Secretary of Transportation."

The president-elect has for months said smart, climate-friendly infrastructure projects can help the U.S. emerge from the coronavirus recession stronger and help support thousands of jobs.

Buttigieg, 38, quickly became a household name during the 2020 elections as a younger, yet still moderate option for Democrats hoping to prevent a second term for President Donald Trump.

Though Buttigieg dropped out of the 2020 race in March despite winning in the Iowa caucuses, the openly gay politician soon thereafter endorsed Biden for president.

The president-elect has often offered high praise for Buttigieg as emblematic of the next generation of Democrats and was widely expected to name him to a high-level administration post.

“Mayor Pete Buttigieg is a patriot and a problem-solver who speaks to the best of who we are as a nation. I am nominating him for Secretary of Transportation because this position stands at the nexus of so many of the interlocking challenges and opportunities ahead of us,” Biden said in a statement. “Jobs, infrastructure, equity, and climate all come together at the DOT, the site of some of our most ambitious plans to build back better. I trust Mayor Pete to lead this work with focus, decency, and a bold vision — he will bring people together to get big things done.”

A business ally of Biden’s told CNBC that Buttigieg could have a big impact on the administration’s infrastructure proposal since he’s not connected to the stagnant talks in Congress about how to pay for such a plan.

“He will not be inhibited by what has always been the limitations on Capitol Hill,” the person said. I “haven’t spoken with him yet, but I am positive if it happens.”

This person declined to be named in order to speak freely.

Among its many proposals, the Biden campaign floated a \$2 trillion plan that, married to his climate goals, would “build a new American infrastructure and clean energy economy.”

The expansive plan includes more general investments for roads and bridges, and more specific proposals like providing every American city with 100,000 or more residents with high-quality, zero-emissions public transportation options.

Buttigieg, a military veteran, is perhaps best known in politics for his two terms as the mayor of South Bend from 2012 to 2020.

Under his tenure, the city embarked on extensive urban development and economic revitalization projects similar to those championed by Biden in promises to revitalize American infrastructure.

[Critics of his time as mayor](#) say his revitalization plans for South Bend did not necessarily benefit racial minorities as much as hoped.

For example, many were optimistic about his plans to knock down or repair nearly all of the city’s vacant homes, a demanding initiative that experts thought beyond possible. The program concentrated on the city’s lowest-income black and Hispanic neighborhoods, where homes were in disrepair.

And while many said they were happy to see dilapidated structures removed, they lamented a lack of planning on what would fill the space.

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## **Trump Signs Short-Term Spending Bill, Preventing Shutdown**

President Trump signed a stopgap funding measure on Friday, averting a federal government shutdown before the clock ran out on the December 11th deadline. The law gives congress members an additional week – until this Friday, December 18th – to negotiate an omnibus spending package for fiscal year 2021. Lawmakers also want to attach to the omnibus to whatever COVID-19 relief package can be negotiated in time. Some additional items to work through for the omnibus conversations, including those that threatened to be holdups on last week’s bill, are emergency spending for veterans’ health care, measures over military policy, blocking lawmakers’ pay during a budgetary impasse, and offering a new round of tax rebate checks to households during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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## **Passing Infrastructure Policies in New Congress**

Eugene Mulero December 14, 2020

During the pandemic, the country’s transportation network garnered a spotlight as first responders and a workforce that includes truckers maneuvered through freight and commuter corridors. Crucial in the delivery of health care supplies, food and other goods is reliable “last-mile” access and a functioning aviation industry.

If one listens to infrastructure stakeholders, a recovery from the pandemic and an economic upturn is achieved with some degree of investments in transportation.

With congressional leaders negotiating a year-end fiscal 2021 funding package that would target transportation agencies, myriad sectors continue to press for billions of dollars in COVID-19 relief. Transit operators renewed their calls for additional aid to avoid disruptions in service. Port operators recently renewed such calls, as well.

As policymakers prepare to kick off the 117th session of Congress in January, they may again acknowledge there are a variety of transportation issues in need of attention. These include, for instance, autonomous vehicles, rural broadband, research and development, renewable energy and alternative sources of funding.

If policymakers are in need of guidance for advancing big-ticket transportation policy items, they could look back at the advice from President Barack Obama’s secretary of transportation, Ray LaHood.

Nearly two years ago, at the start of the 116th Congress, LaHood offered members of the U.S. House transportation committee a road map for passing comprehensive infrastructure legislation.

This four-step process for realizing such an endeavor consisted of acknowledging that a sustainable source of money is needed for the construction and maintenance of infrastructure programs. Then, deliver bipartisan legislation to the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee so those members resolve the Highway Trust Fund. At Ways and Means, approve a fuel tax increase that would help ensure the trust fund’s solvency. Finally, send a final bill to the Senate to clear it for the president’s signature.

Transportation leaders approved House and Senate highway bills but did not deliver to President Donald Trump the legislation during the 116th Congress. The Highway Trust Fund's woes linked to the 1993 fuel tax rate continue to loom over policymakers, and the matter of updating the country's highway law was pushed to September 2021.

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## Report urges Congress to reform surface transportation funding

BY [LIZ CAREY](#) | DECEMBER 11, 2020

With Congress and the president only funding surface transportation through September 2021, the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI) has issued a report urging Congress to reform how surface transportation is funded.

The CEI report highlights the shortfall within the Highway Trust Fund and a mismatch between who pays for roads and who uses them. While Congress is expected to tackle the funding issue starting in January, a new way of thinking about infrastructure funding needs to occur on the Hill, the report said.

"Currently in the United States, 7 percent of bridges are structurally deficient, and 19 percent of major highway pavements have deteriorated. Yet, our existing financing structure has few tools to address the looming reconstruction challenges facing existing infrastructure," the report said. "Meanwhile, the last large surge of federal "stimulus"-backed repair funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 largely went to simple pavement surface mill-and-fill projects that will soon need to be replaced from the ground up. Congress needs to address the inadequacy of existing legacy programs and answer the question of how to support economic growth while conserving existing infrastructure."

The report looks at the U.S. Interstate Highway System's long-run average cost, using 60 years of financial records. Additionally, the report details the gap between cost and revenue, leading to a system that is becoming unreliable and deficient. The report also explores how some projects could be throttled by rural intercity travel and urban commuting and suggests there may be a middle ground between general fund spending and nationwide tolling in an atmosphere of "the expectation of ongoing public subsidy."

CEI recommends that policy-makers work to "return to a marketplace that values incremental infrastructure improvements, respects local governance, balances rural and urban access..., and enables personal wealth creation while fixing the trust fund cliff," by normalizing infrastructure investment to find a missing financial metric that measure per intercity traveled person-mile and freight container mile, and adjusting economic models for vehicle time saved used to select projects to conform to actual consumer time-utility values that support marketplace rates.

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## U.S. Department of Transportation Launches New Regional Infrastructure Accelerators Program

Wednesday, December 16, 2020

*Program will expedite delivery of transportation infrastructure projects through innovative finance and delivery methods; includes \$5 million in financial support*

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation today launched a new demonstration program to establish several Regional Infrastructure Accelerators (Accelerators), which will expedite delivery of transportation infrastructure projects through innovative finance and delivery methods. The Department's Build America Bureau (the Bureau) issued a [Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) to solicit applications to designate Accelerators that will serve defined geographic areas, act as a resource to qualified entities within the designated areas, and demonstrate the effectiveness of these Accelerators to expedite the delivery of eligible projects through Federal credit assistance programs, including Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) and other innovative financing methods. A total of \$5 million is available for the program.

"These Regional Infrastructure Accelerators will deliver projects more quickly to local communities through innovative financing methods," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Elaine L. Chao.

The Accelerators will assist project sponsors in project planning, evaluating innovative financing options, accessing technical assistance and best practices, and developing a pipeline of projects ready for investment.

The Bureau will administer the Regional Infrastructure Accelerator program. The Bureau was established as a "one-stop shop" to streamline credit opportunities while also providing technical assistance and encouraging innovative best practices in project planning, financing, delivery, and operation.

During Secretary Chao's tenure at Department, the Bureau has closed over \$9.91 billion in TIFIA and Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) loans, supporting more than \$33.16 billion in infrastructure investment across the country. Under Secretary Chao's leadership, the Department has sought to address the unique challenges rural communities face in upgrading their infrastructure. Last year, Secretary Chao announced the Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success (ROUTES) Initiative to address disparities in rural transportation infrastructure investment. Additionally, the Department launched the TIFIA Rural Project Initiative (RPI) to assist rural communities in overcoming financial barriers that slow infrastructure investment in rural America.

For more information on the Regional Infrastructure Accelerators program and to learn more about the Build America Bureau, please visit <https://www.transportation.gov/buildamerica/financing/tifia/regional-infrastructure-accelerators-program>

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## Funding Opportunities

## FY 2021 Recreational Trails Program (RTP) Application Workshop Announced RTP Application due March 3, 2021

The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) will be conducting a virtual application workshop for FY 2021 Recreational Trails Program (RTP) funds due to public safety concerns regarding COVID-19. The workshop will be held on Wednesday, January 13, 2021, at 9:00 am.

Join from a video system or application

Dial [1772540392@al.gov.webex.com](mailto:1772540392@al.gov.webex.com)

You can also dial 173.243.2.68 and enter your meeting number.

RTP applications for FY 2021 will be accepted beginning Wednesday, January 13, 2021, through 12:00 Noon on Wednesday, March 3, 2021.

Applications may be mailed to:

ADECA  
CED Division – Recreational Trails Program  
Attention: Ms. LaToya Edwards  
401 Adams Avenue, Room 524  
Montgomery, Alabama 36104

or emailed to:

[latoya.edwards@adeca.alabama.gov](mailto:latoya.edwards@adeca.alabama.gov)

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## FY2021 Effects of Sea Level Rise (ESLR) (deadline 1/8/21)

There is a notice of funding opportunity concerning the effect of sea level rise that has a relatively short time frame to submit a letter of intent. This is the link to the grant program, <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppld=328992>.

NOAA-NOS-NCCOS-2021-2006594

FY21 Effects of Sea Level Rise (ESLR)

Department of Commerce

This solicitation is to improve adaptation and planning in response to regional and local effects of sea level rise and coastal inundation through targeted research on key technologies, natural and nature-based infrastructure, physical and biological processes, and model evaluation. The overall goal of the ESLR Program is to facilitate informed adaptation planning and coastal management decisions through a multidisciplinary research program that results in integrated models of dynamic physical and biological processes capable of evaluating vulnerability and resilience under multiple SLR, inundation, and management scenarios.

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## New CDBG GRANT Program

To Address COVID-19 Impacts (currently no deadline)

The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) is in the process of developing a special Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) grant program to address COVID-19 impacts.

DETAILS: Currently, no application deadline, grant ceilings or other program details have been finalized.

MORE DETAILS WILL BE PROVIDED AT A LATER DATE; however, please download the guide below to get started and identify potential partners as needed.

[CLICK HERE](#) to download the Quick Guide to CDBG Eligible Activities to Support Infectious Disease Response that will assist applicants to begin thinking about possible project needs.

Please note that applications to the CDBG program must be in the name of a local government as the applicant/grantee.

Partnerships and agreements with other agencies/entities, etc. can be developed as necessary. CDBG projects must also benefit primarily low and moderate-income people and this requirement will likely remain for the new funds.

RESOURCES/ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

The Department has technical assistance providers that may be available to assist grantees in their implementation of CDBG Funds for activities to prevent or respond to the spread of infectious disease.

Please contact your local CPD Field Office Director to request technical assistance from HUD staff or a TA provider.

Submit your questions to:

[CPDQuestionsAnswered@hud.gov](mailto:CPDQuestionsAnswered@hud.gov)

COVID-19 ("Coronavirus") Information and Resources: <https://www.hud.gov/coronavirus>

CPD Program Guidance and Training: <https://www.hudexchange.info/program-support/>

EDA CARES ACT RECOVERY ASSISTANCE (currently no deadline)

OVERVIEW

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, [signed into law](#) by President Donald J. Trump on March 27, 2020, provides the Economic Development Administration (EDA) with \$1.5 billion for economic development assistance programs to help communities prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus.

EDA CARES Act Recovery Assistance, which is being administered under the authority of the bureau's flexible [Economic Adjustment Assistance](#) (EAA) (PDF) program, provides a wide-range of financial assistance to communities and regions as they respond to and recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

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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).

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

This morning was 29 degrees in Mobile, and if you had tomato or pepper plants, you probably lost them. This cold weather can do some damage, even to our roads. Pot holes form from pavement contracting and expanding due to weather conditions, and nobody ever loves potholes. Just For Fun, where's the love?



## In the News

### BRATS launching 'On-Demand' app

Posted Friday, December 18, 2020

By Guy Busby

BAY MINETTE – Baldwin County's public transportation system is launching an on-demand scheduling app to allow riders to arrange rides online.

The Baldwin Rural Transportation System will offer BRATS On-Demand, a scheduling app that will allow riders to book trips around the county using their smart phone, similar to scheduling a ride-sharing service, Matthew Brown, system director, said Tuesday.

"BRATS has served the citizens of Baldwin County for years, but as times change, so do kind of the demands of the population," Brown said.

BRATS was established in 1988. Until now, most riders had to call dispatchers at least 24 hours in advance to arrange trips. The scheduling booklet was 40 pages long and often confusing to system employees, including Brown.

He said BRATS provides good service, but the scheduling and dispatch has not kept up with changing times.

"Amazon Prime can deliver a package from almost anywhere in the country to our door at about the same time that we can deploy a local bus to get someone a trip, 24 hours in advance," Brown said.

In 2019, county officials began talking to ride-sharing services to improve the dispatching system, Brown told Baldwin County commissioners.

"We want to expand to new passengers, folks who maybe would not have thought to use BRATS before, knowing now that when they need to get their child to maybe ball practice or something and something's come up, they can take one of our vehicles where we have background checked drivers," Brown said. "We have video cameras on our buses and know that's a safe option that they can get on their phone on a smart phone app and book very quickly."

Brown said the new system could be the first of its kind.

“We became what, at least we’re told, is the world’s first rural mobility on-demand deployment where the whole entire system is being run by this software,” Brown said.

He said the price for the service will not change.

“The pricing is staying the same, it’s still just \$2 for the first five miles and 50 cents for each additional five-mile increment after that,” Brown said. “It’s a very, very affordable service.”

“This is the kind of innovation we encourage when it comes to providing services to our citizens,” Commission Chairman Joe Davis said. “Our staff look for ways to be as efficient as possible and BRATS On-Demand is a great example of that. We also realize that technology can be intimidating for some and we are here to help those who need assistance downloading and using the new app.”

Commissioner Charles “Skip” Gruber many residents rely on BRATS for transportation and the update will improve the service.

“I think this is the right move,” Gruber said. “BRATS has come a long way.”

Anyone wanting more information about the service or instructions on how to download the app, can go to [www.ridebrats.com](http://www.ridebrats.com) or call 251-972-6817.

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## Transportation construction activity to fall modestly next year, ARTBA says

BY [LIZ CAREY](#) | DECEMBER 17, 2020

A new report from the American Road and Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA) has projected a 5.5 percent decline in transportation construction activity in 2021.

The report, released earlier this month, said the decline will be driven by unprecedented revenue shortfalls for transportation authorities at the state, city, county and local level, coupled with lower demand for travel and freight services.

ARTBA’s model estimates the amount of work overall is expected to fall from \$294.2 billion in 2020 to \$278.1 billion in 2021.

But the association’s five-year plan sees transportation construction climbing again starting in 2022.

“Growth is expected to resume in 2022 as economic conditions improve and travel demand in some sectors begins to return to pre-recession levels. Congressional action in 2021 on a multi-year surface transportation bill—provided it includes a sustainable and robust increase in funding—would be a key factor in helping accelerate recovery in the highway, bridge, and transit construction markets,” the report said.

Alison Premo Black, chief economist for ARTBA, said work reached record levels in 2020.

“Work has continued this year in every mode except bridges, which has really been a testament to this industry and how folks really delivered on projects throughout this year, given the concerns over worker safety and the situations everybody has been facing along with COVID,” she said in a webinar about the report.

Overall, Black said, states are trying to preserve their capital programs over the next couple of years.

Although Pennsylvania and Washington state temporarily shut down projects in the spring, transportation construction was considered an essential industry throughout the rest of the United States.

Some states decided to take advantage of lower traffic volumes to accelerate project delivery times. ARTBA projected that total transportation construction activity for 2020 is expected to increase by nearly 4 percent, with gains in highway and street construction, subway and light rail work, airport terminal and runway construction, and port and waterway spending.

However, the organization noted that bridge and tunnel construction fell 20 percent in 2020. The decline was attributed to state and local governments’ focus on smaller structures over the last two years. The average size of bridge contract awards in 2019 was down in 32 states, the association said, and fell in value from \$3.8 billion in 2017 to \$2.5 billion in 2019.

ARTBA’s model projected that transportation construction levels would return to 2020 levels in 2023, and grow from there in 2024 and 2025.

The next six months, Black said, are critical, as states go back in to look at their revenue forecasts and different factors hit the economy. Stimulus packages through Congress, a vaccine and other elements could impact the economy, which could, in turn, affect whether state and local governments have the funding for transportation construction projects.

ARTBA said that states are anticipating between \$35 billion and \$40 billion in transportation revenue shortfalls through 2024.

Also, Congress reauthorizing the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act is key to keeping transportation construction up, she said. Congress approved a one-year extension of the legislation that provides long-term funding for surface transportation infrastructure planning and investment, but Congress will have to act in 2021 to ensure that the funding is reauthorized.

"Over the last three fiscal years, Congress has provided a total of \$15 billion in supplemental funds for highways, bridges, transit, and airports above the programmed levels in the FAST Act and the Airport Improvement Program (AIP)," the report said. "Funds were provided to states through the formula program, as well as through Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) America discretionary grants that can be used for a variety of transportation infrastructure projects."

Most significantly, airport terminal and runway construction projects would see the biggest drop: from \$24.6 billion in projects in 2020 to \$20.5 billion in projects in 2021, a drop of 16.7 percent. ARTBA also projected drops next year in private highways, bridge construction, parking lots and driveways (down 8.2 percent to \$66.4 billion in projects) and public highway, street and related work (down 4 percent to \$74.5 billion in projects). The only mode to see growth in 2021, ARTBA forecasted, will be ports and waterways, up 3 percent to \$3.9 billion in projects.

Decreases in airport terminal and runway projects is reflected in the decline in airline passenger enplanements since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Airline officials said ridership on planes dropped 95 percent in April and is still at low rates currently, about 70 percent of what it was last year.

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## Virtual Public Involvement

Public involvement is a critical component in the transportation decision-making process, allowing for meaningful consideration and input from interested individuals. Early and strong public engagement helps transportation agencies accelerate project delivery by identifying and addressing public concerns early in the planning process. Many transportation agencies still rely on traditional forms of public involvement, such as in-person public hearings, paper displays, maps, and brochures. [Virtual public involvement](#) (VPI) strategies enhance face-to-face information sharing by engaging wider, more diverse audiences and addressing barriers such as potential participants' busy schedules.

Innovative virtual public involvement techniques provide State, local and Tribal departments of transportation (DOTs), transit agencies, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), and rural transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) with a platform to inform the public and receive feedback. These strategies increase the number and variety of channels available to agencies for remotely disseminating information to the public and create efficiencies in how input is collected and considered.

Nearly all State DOTs and most local agencies use websites to post information about their activities. With the increased use of social media tools and mobile applications, the public can access user-friendly features such as online videos, podcasts, crowdsourced maps, and other interactive forums to receive information and provide input. These new opportunities for information sharing and public involvement in the transportation planning, programming, and project development process include:

- telephone town halls
- online meetings
- pop-up outreach
- social meetings/meeting-in-a box kits
- story maps
- quick videos
- crowdsourcing, survey tools
- real-time polling tools
- social media following
- visualization
- working with bloggers

During EDC-6, the VPI team will provide resources and strategies to help your agency make VPI part of your standard business practices while still meeting statutory and regulatory requirements and expanding its reach. Finally, the team will help agencies include virtual accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

To learn more about virtual public involvement, contact [Jill Stark](#), [Lana Lau](#), or [Carolyn Nelson](#), EDC-6 team co-leads or visit the innovation's [EDC website](#).

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## Transportation Research

It's almost here! The much-anticipated **Notice of Proposed Amendments (NPA) to the MUTCD** is about to be published for public comment!

The proposed **11th Edition of the MUTCD** is now previewing in today's [Federal Register](#). The public docket will open for comment beginning **Monday, December 14**.

The NPA represents a comprehensive update to the MUTCD, incorporating the results of **over 150 Official Experiments** of novel traffic control devices and applications, **Official Interpretations, Interim Approvals**, and **other research** conducted both independently and by the Traffic Control Device Consortium Pooled Fund.

- **In brief**, there are more than 600 proposed changes, comprehensively described in the Notice.
- A mark-up document of the proposed MUTCD text and separate documents containing the proposed Figures and Tables will be available when the public docket officially opens for comment on **Monday, December 14**. In the meantime, please visit the [Federal Register pre-publication notice](#) for a glimpse of the proposed changes and view the FHWA's [press release](#).

**About us.** The FHWA administers the national standards for Traffic Control Devices through the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways* (MUTCD). The mission of the National Traffic Control Devices program is to promote the safe and efficient operation of streets and highways through a uniform system of traffic signs, signals, and markings.

Stay tuned--and subscribed--to receive updates on this and other ongoing activities of the National Traffic Control Devices program. Additional information will be made available periodically at the [MUTCD Web site](#).

And don't forget, the complete [MUTCD Official Rulings Database](#) is available for you to browse topics covered in past Experiments, Interpretations, and Change requests.

## **FHWA Proposes More Flexible Design Standards to Repair the Nation's Freeways and Interstates**

Tuesday, November 24, 2020

FHWA 28-20

Contact: Nancy Singer

Tel.: 202-366-0660

WASHINGTON – The Federal Highway Administration today published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) to allow State departments of transportation more flexibility with design standards to repair the nation's freeways and interstate highways.

"The FHWA proposes to provide regulatory relief to States to address the immediate repair needs of our nation's roadways without compromising safety and efficiency," Federal Highway Administrator Nicole R. Nason said.

The rule would allow States to develop design standards for resurfacing, restoration and rehabilitation projects—commonly known as RRR—for freeways, including those on the interstate system, which has been a longstanding practice for non-freeway projects.

Consistent with federal law, RRR standards would be required to preserve and extend the service life of the existing road and enhance highway safety. This change would allow States to develop RRR freeway projects using a performance-based, flexible approach.

The RRR standards developed by States would be subject to FHWA approval. FHWA would continue to work with state departments of transportation as they develop RRR design standards that integrate safety and cost-effectiveness.

The rule also proposes to incorporate by reference the latest versions of design standards and standard specifications that have been previously adopted.

[The NPRM is available here.](#)

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## **USDOT announces first-ever plan targeting pedestrian injuries, fatalities**

BY [DOUGLAS CLARK](#) | NOVEMBER 25, 2020

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) said its recently released Pedestrian Safety Action Plan seeks to address the reduction of pedestrian injuries and fatalities on America's roads.

"This unprecedented comprehensive safety effort is focused solely on protecting pedestrians because crossing a street should not be lethal for thousands of adults and children every year," Transportation Secretary Elaine L. Chao said.

Under the guidance of Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Administrator Nicole R. Nason and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Deputy Administrator James Owens, the plan targets NHTSA's Fatality Analysis Reporting System findings revealing

17 percent of all traffic fatalities last year involved pedestrians – noting 6,205 pedestrians were killed in traffic crashes, representing 44 percent more than in 2010.

“Reducing pedestrian fatalities is a team effort that requires collaboration between federal, state, and local transportation leaders,” Nason said. “We need safer roads and this plan provides a road map to get us there.”

The USDOT maintains the Pedestrian Safety Action Plan endeavors to promote expanded use of countermeasures, technology, and data-driven practices to address pedestrian fatalities and injuries.

“At some point in the day, we are all pedestrians – especially right now, when everyone wants to get outside for some fresh air,” NHTSA Deputy Administrator James Owens said. “Everyone has a role to play in ensuring pedestrian safety, and this Pedestrian Safety Action Plan will help communities, drivers, and pedestrians take steps to save lives.”

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## NHTSA Releases Pedestrian Safety Playbook and Active Transportation Data Visualizations

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) released a playbook with social media strategies and resources to support Pedestrian Safety Month activities. It provides information on vehicle speed enforcement and Walk to School Day activities; distracted drivers and impaired pedestrians; illegal school bus passing; and conspicuity/Day Light Saving Time, and older pedestrians. NHTSA also developed two interactive data visualization dashboards displaying pedestrian and bicyclist fatality data between 2010 and 2018. Based on Fatality Analysis Reporting System data, the dashboard allows users to view key data by State, year, month, time of day, age group, and land type. Click [HERE](#) to see the Playbook.

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## FEDERAL-AID HIGHWAYS:

### States and Local Governments Reported Benefits to Federal Highway Fund Swapping, but Impacts Cannot be Definitively Determined

GAO-21-88: Published: Oct 20, 2020. Publicly Released: Nov 19, 2020.

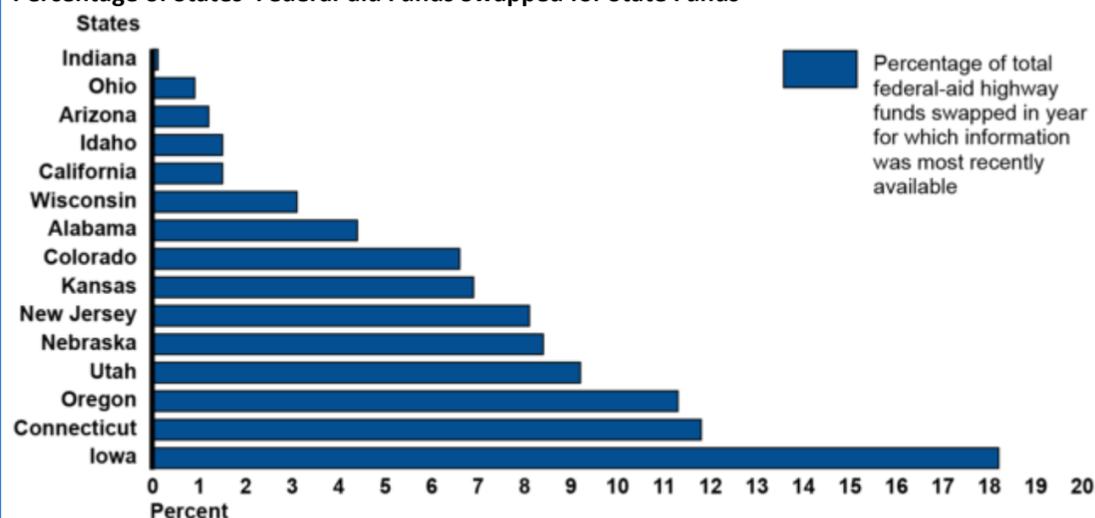
The Federal Highway Administration provides funding to states to build and maintain the nation's roads. When using federal dollars states must follow federal standards such as paying prevailing wages. Some states established programs in which local agencies swap federal for state dollars. When they do, they follow state instead of federal standards.

In the last 5 years, 15 states reported swapping programs. The amount of highway funds swapped ranged from less than 1% (Indiana) to about 18% (Iowa). Reports were mixed on whether this meant lower wages for workers and on other potential effects.

#### What GAO Found

In the past 5 years, 15 states reported they had fund swapping programs, which allow local agencies, such as cities and towns, to swap their state's proposed suballocation of federal-aid highway funds for state transportation funds. This exchange allows local agencies to undertake local projects with state funds, rendering the projects subject to applicable state and local, rather than federal, requirements. For most states, the reported amount of federal funds swapped is a relatively small portion of the state's overall federal-aid apportionment, ranging from less than 1 percent to 12 percent. However, Iowa swapped about 18 percent (or about \$97 million) of its federal-aid funds in 2019. See figure.

Percentage of States' Federal-aid Funds Swapped for State Funds



Source: GAO analysis of information from state DOT officials and FHWA data. | GAO-21-88

Note: Data are for 2019, except for Alabama, Colorado, New Jersey, and Wisconsin where GAO presents the most recent data these state DOT officials had available.

Officials GAO interviewed from state departments of transportation (DOTs) and selected local agencies said that they participate in fund swapping because it increases project flexibility for local agencies and may result in time and cost savings. Obstacles officials cited included a lack of sufficient state funds to swap with local agencies and the absence of state law authorizing fund swapping.

The impact of fund swapping on wages and other federal requirements cannot be definitively determined because, among other reasons, state DOTs generally do not track data needed to measure these impacts. For example, state officials said that federal funds swapped by

local agencies are combined with other federal funds, so they cannot identify which projects were funded with swapped federal dollars. State officials offered mixed views of the impact of swapping on workers' wages and other federal requirements. For example, officials in two states that told GAO their states do not have prevailing wage laws said wages paid were not impacted by the lack of federal prevailing wage requirements because of economic conditions in their states. Officials in two other states said that the lack of a state prevailing wage law potentially enabled contractors to pay their workers less than the federal prevailing wage on swapped projects.

#### Why GAO Did This Study

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) provides funding to states to build and maintain the nation's roadways and bridges. States must follow applicable federal standards such as laws that require contractors to pay locally prevailing wages. States can make federal funding available to local agencies for projects, but the ability of local agencies to comply with federal requirements is a well-documented risk area. Some states have established "fund swapping" programs where local agencies swap proposed federal funding with the state in return for state dollars. FHWA does not directly oversee these programs, and no federal statutes or regulations authorize or prohibit fund swapping.

GAO was asked to review swapping of federal-aid highway funds and its impact. In this report, GAO describes: (1) the extent to which states and local agencies engage in fund swapping; (2) factors affecting whether state and local agencies engage in federal fund swapping; and (3) what is known about the impact fund swapping has on prevailing wages paid to workers and other federal requirements. GAO reviewed relevant regulations and reports; sent a questionnaire to officials in 50 states; and interviewed officials from 15 state DOTs that reported having swapped funds in the past 5 years and 3 local agencies selected for program size and other factors.

The U.S. Department of Transportation provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

For more information, contact Elizabeth Repko at (202) 512-2384 or [repkoe@gao.gov](mailto:repkoe@gao.gov).

## Opportunity Zones

The Department of Transportation has identified transportation assets that fall within Opportunity Zones with the goal of driving investment of all types to these important areas.

Despite the growing national economy, economically distressed communities are located in every corner of the United States and its territories. These communities have high levels of poverty, failing schools, job scarcity, and a lack of investment. A new tax incentive—Opportunity Zones—was created to spur economic development and job creation by encouraging long-term investment in low-income communities nationwide.

Read about our partner's roles in Opportunity Zones:

- [Housing and Urban Development: Implementation Plan for The White House Opportunity and Revitalization Council](#)
- [The IRS: Tax reform creates opportunity zone tax incentive](#)
- [Treasury Department Community Development Financial Institutions Fund](#)

The Opportunity Zone designation encourages investment in communities by granting investors extensive Federal tax advantages for using their capital gains to finance new projects and enterprises. There are more than [8,700 designated Qualified Opportunity Zones located in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and five United States territories](#). Of the Qualified Opportunity Zones 40 percent are in rural census tracts, 38 percent are in urban tracts, and 22 percent are in suburban tracts.

#### South Alabama Opportunity Zones



<https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/docs/subdoc/906/build-fact-sheet2019.pdf>

## 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.