



# Transportation Friday

An electronic newsletter concerning regional transportation issues

Friday, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Volume 38, Number 2

## In This Issue

- MOBILE MPO UPDATES
- PROJECTS LET APRIL 30<sup>TH</sup>, 2021
- LEGISLATIVE UPDATES
- FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES
- JUST FOR FUN
- IN THE NEWS
- TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH

## Contact Us

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

Kevin Harrison, PTP  
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)

John F. "Rickey"  
Rhodes  
SARPC Executive  
Director  
[rrhodes@sarpc.org](mailto:rrhodes@sarpc.org)

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

**BIG NEWS in the MOBILE MPO UPDATES:** 100% funding for local road resurfacing within Mobile Urbanized Area provided by MPO; also, there is some MPO movement on the I-10 Mobile River Bridge. RAISE Grants (formerly BUILD, TIGER, etc) announced by the USDOT, State and Urban FTA 5310, and State and Urban **TAP** are available (see *funding Opportunities*). The Infrastructure Plan dominates *Legislative Updates*. In *The News*, the ESMPO introduces a funding idea for the Bridge, pizza deliveries, and the new Downtown Airport. This week's *Just For Fun*, is....boring. Have a great weekend.

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

### 100 % Funding for Resurfacing of Local Roads Through the Mobile MPO with CRRSAA

(April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021)

In accordance with the Highway Infrastructure Program Funds Pursuant to the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSAA) dated January 15, 2021 from the Federal Highway Administration, the Mobile Transportation Management Area (TMA) through the Mobile Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is apportioned \$3,193,942 (FY 2021). In consultation with the State of Alabama, it is the intention of the Mobile MPO to use the Mobile TMA apportioned CRRSAA funding (\$3,193,942) for a one time competitive application award program. This funding can be 100% federal funding with no matching requirements; this presents a rare opportunity for the Mobile MPO.

Some of our municipalities in the Mobile MPO, do not have adequate revenue streams to provide the matching requirements when federal funds become available. Further, some of the smaller municipalities in the MPO only have one Federal Aid Route in their municipal limits (US43, SR181). Rarely do these municipalities have the opportunity to spend federal transportation funds through the MPO. Per the above noted guidance, routine maintenance and preventative maintenance on non-federal aid highways is allowed if Special Authority is given to the MPO by the State.

The State of Alabama has awarded the Mobile MPO the Special Authority to proceed.

The cities of Creola, Satsuma, Saraland, Chickasaw, Prichard, Semmes and Bayou la Batre will need to provide a prioritized list of roads that need to be resurfaced within their jurisdiction. No ROW, or additional capacity is allowed, and there will be some responsibility of each municipality in terms of assisting with clear zones, encroachment, and liabilities. This is 100 % funding, with no matching requirements. Communication with MPO staff is through the Mayor of each municipality.

Please call Kevin Harrison 706-4635 if there are any questions.

### 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.

### The I-10 Mobile River Bridge LRTP Amendment

In order for Phase One of the I-10 Mobile River Bridge (the Truck Bridge) to move forward as announced in the March 22<sup>nd</sup> press release (below), the Mobile MPO and Eastern Shore MPO have to amend each Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) to account for the Phase One. Once that happens the project can enter the 2020-2023 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and move to be authorized. A DRAFT Amendment has been proposed by the Mobile MPO staff to be reviewed by ALDOT and the FHWA, to account for the Phase One of the I-10 Mobile River Bridge (the Truck Bridge) to move forward. Once Mobile MPO staff receives comments from FHWA on the Draft Amendment to the LRTP, the draft amendment will be available for public review, a public meeting will be held in conjunction with a Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) meeting, Technical Coordination / Citizen Advisory (TCC/CAC) meeting, and then eventually a MPO Policy Board meeting to amend the LRTP and the TIP to include Phase One. We are anticipating a public meeting in the

beginning of May, and a Mobile MPO Policy Board meeting in mid May; dates TBD. As the Biden Infrastructure Bill moves forward, it is critical the bridge project be in each MPO's LRTP and TIP.

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

---

## New bridge plan only includes fees for large trucks

Posted by [Dale Liesch](#) | Mar 22, 2021 (reprinted from LAGNIAPPE with permission)



(PHOTO Kevin Harrison)

### New bridge plan only includes fees for large trucks

Posted by [Dale Liesch](#) | Mar 22, 2021

Officials with both local Metropolitan Planning organizations and the Alabama Department of Transportation announced a plan on Monday, March 22 for a cheaper Interstate 10 bridge over the Mobile River that would only serve large trucks.

The idea, introduced by Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson, Fairhope City Council President Jack Burrell, U.S. Rep. Jerry Carl, and former ALDOT Division Engineer Vince Calametti, aims to build a truck-only cable-stayed bridge and to restripe the existing Bayway with three lanes in each direction instead of two.

Priced at \$725 million, about half the funding for the project would come from state and federal sources, in the form of Grant Anticipation Revenue Vehicle (GARVEE) bonds, Calametti said. Around \$400 million would come from a fee charged to trucks 46 feet and above using the bridge, Calametti said. The bridge would "most likely" be designated an Interstate 10 truck route, he said, and smaller vehicles would not be allowed on it.

"The fee will be less than half the proposed fee included in the previous plan," he said. "It is estimated between \$10 and \$15. It won't be more than \$15."

The 46-foot or longer stipulation, Calametti said, would prevent smaller trucks, like those used for local deliveries, from being impacted. It's too early to speculate, he said, if the toll would ever sunset. That would be determined at a later date.

Existing routes, including the Bankhead Tunnel, the Wallace Tunnel, the Bayway and the Causeway will remain toll free, Calametti said. By removing large trucks from the Wallace Tunnel, Calametti said, commute time could be cut by 60 to 90 minutes during peak travel time. Trucks will also be diverted from the Cochran Africatown Bridge, he said. The trucks would use the so-called "truck bridge" instead.

The increase from four lanes to six lanes on the Bayway is designed to increase efficiency by some 40 percent, also during peak times, Calametti said. While the new lanes would eat up the shoulders that currently exist on the Bayway, Calametti said ALDOT would double the size of its emergency response team — stationing a truck in both Baldwin County and Mobile County. In addition, turnarounds would be added to allow distressed travelers to pull over if need be.

The phased approach of the project would also see a second bridge and a new Bayway built under later phases, Calametti said. Unlike the last proposal, this project would be controlled completely by the state and would not be a public-private partnership.

The timeline for construction for this concept would be 2022 to 2023, as the state would lose out on a \$125 million federal grant if the project is not underway by the third quarter of 2022. This was a point Stimpson, who is chairman of the Mobile MPO, and Burrell, chairman of the Eastern Shore MPO, said was important. It was one of three points they made in discussions with Gov. Kay Ivey in January about keeping the project alive.

"No. 1, it had to reduce congestion," Burrell said. "No. 2, it had to protect the \$125 million federal grant and No. 3, it needed to leave all the existing routes untolled. The MPO response has been very, very favorable."

Stimpson reiterated the importance of keeping the large federal grant active.

"Protecting the \$125 million grant is critically important," he said. "We need to demonstrate to the federal government that there's local support or the federal government will redirect the funds."

The new project, Stimpson said, would help move passengers and commerce across the bay more quickly and more efficiently, which would help secure more jobs and opportunities to the area.

“We believe this plan is a good, solid plan,” he said. “There will be no tolls for cars and small trucks.”

Carl, who was elected to congress in November, told the crowd gathered for a press conference that leaders he has spoken with in Washington — specifically those who’ve been trapped on the Bayway — understand the need for a bridge, as does local leadership. “Part of my campaign rhetoric was focused on the bridge,” he said. “Everyone agrees the bridge is needed.”

The first step for the new project would be to gain the approval of both the Mobile and Eastern Shore MPOs, Calametti said. Following approval by the boards, ALDOT would begin to hold public hearings.

---

### **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 : 100068535 ( CN )

Federal aid number : STPMB 4918

County : MOBILE

Project Description : ADDITIONAL LANES WITH REALIGNMENT ON CR-56 FROM 0.28 MILE WEST OF ELIZA JORDAN ROAD TO SNOW ROAD

Old Target start date : December 02, 2022

New Target start date : September 29, 2023

Project : 100068533 ( RW )

Federal aid number : STPMB 4918

County : MOBILE

Project Description : ADDITIONAL LANES WITH REALIGNMENT ON CR-56 FROM 0.28 MILE WEST OF ELIZA JORDAN ROAD TO SNOW ROAD

Old Target start date : August 01, 2021

New Target start date : March 01, 2022

Project : 100052462 ( RW )

Federal aid number : STPMB 4919 (250)

County : MOBILE

Project Description : THREE NOTCH ROAD (CR-32) ADDITIONAL LANES FROM SCHILLINGER ROAD TO MCDONALD ROAD.

Old Target start date : September 01, 2021

New Target start date : May 01, 2022

---

## **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 April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

### **MOBILE COUNTY**

None at this time

### **BALDWIN COUNTY**

- For constructing the Maintenance Dredging of Little Lagoon Pass in Gulf Shores as indicated in the plans. The Bracket Estimate on this project is from \$838,297 to \$1,024,585 .

### **ESCAMBIA COUNTY**

None at this time.

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

---

## **Legislative Updates**

## Biden's Budget Would Up Spending on State and Local Programs

Late last week, President Joe Biden released his [preliminary fiscal 2022 budget plan](#), a blueprint which includes \$769 billion in non-defense discretionary funding (a broad category that covers many of the grants that flow to the state and local level) and \$753 billion for defense discretionary funding. This amount would mark a 16% increase and 1.5% increase from fiscal year 2021 amounts, respectively. This \$1.5 billion budget plan comes as Congress is coming up on the expiration of budget caps imposed a decade ago, which happens this year. [Republicans swiftly opposed the plan](#), saying that Biden's budget "prioritized spending trillions on liberal wish list priorities," while neglecting the military. President Biden remains hopeful for cooperation on his budget plans and other priorities. Here are some of the proposal's highlights for localities:

- Ramping up [Title I](#) grants flowing to high-poverty schools by \$20 billion
- Expanding Housing Choice Vouchers to 200,000 more low-income families
- Providing \$500 million in added funding for an affordable housing grant program known as HOME Investment Partnerships – its highest funding level since 2009
- 23% increase to the [Capital Investment Grant program](#), to \$2.5 billion
- \$2.7 billion for Amtrak, a 35% increase
- Community Development Block Grant funding would rise under the spending proposal to \$3.8 billion, which would include a \$295 million increase targeted to incentivize communities to use the money for infrastructure upgrades in historically underfunded communities
- \$717 million, a \$100 million hike, for a program run by the Department of Agriculture that provides grants and low-cost loans that rural water systems regularly tap for projects
- \$401 million—a \$162 million increase—for state and local grants for programs geared toward reducing gun violence
- \$1.2 billion more than the fiscal 2021 budget for "resilience" projects meant to better protect communities from threats like wildfire, drought, and flooding
- \$815 million—a \$540 million plus-up—to "incorporate climate impacts into pre-disaster planning and projects"
- \$1.4 billion in environmental justice initiatives
- \$550 million to remediate abandoned oil and gas wells and mining lands

## As Biden shifts infrastructure focus to climate and racial justice, cities and states alter pitches for federal money

By [Ian Duncan](#) April 15, 2021

Cities and states across the country are pitching new kinds of infrastructure projects and offering fresh assessments of existing proposals as they chase \$2 billion in grant funding the Biden administration has tied to environmental and racial-justice goals.

Seleta Reynolds, general manager of the Los Angeles Department of Transportation, initially did not plan to apply for a federal Infrastructure For Rebuilding America grant, a \$900 million pot of money targeted at economy-boosting projects. It has typically been used to back major highway projects and other work to reduce congestion and speed travel for cars and trucks.

But shortly after Pete Buttigieg was confirmed as transportation secretary, his department announced that it would judge projects based on their racial-equity and environmental benefits. Reynolds assembled a team that scrambled to put together an application.

The city is seeking \$45 million to help fund projects on major streets in South Los Angeles, trying to remedy harms caused by an interstate highway running through the area. The proposal calls for bike lanes, safer crosswalks, new shade trees and bus-boarding islands. It also would involve installing 300 electric-vehicle chargers, putting up air-quality sensors and extending broadband access to 11,000 homes.

"I see it as a form of validating and showing L.A.'s support for this pivot U.S. DOT is trying to make," Reynolds said. "If they really want projects that center equity and climate, I want to give them one."

The new criteria demonstrate one way Buttigieg's team has put its imprint on the Department of Transportation. They also offer a preview of how the administration is seeking to reshape the nation's transportation networks as it tries to advance major infrastructure funding through Congress. The \$600 billion transportation portion of the package — part of a \$2 trillion proposal — calls for the expansion of existing grant funds and the creation of new ones.

"We are committed to not just rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure, but building back in a way that positions American communities for success in the future," Buttigieg said in a statement in February when the new INFRA standards were announced.

In March, the department added climate and equity criteria to a \$230 million port infrastructure grant program, and this week, it rebranded its marquee \$1 billion grant program as RAISE — Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity.

The grant programs are a way for the federal government to shape the behavior of states and cities that build the nation's roads and bridges. Applicants and consultants who work with the jurisdictions say projects will have to be reassessed to be competitive for the coveted awards, even if environmental and racial-justice issues had not previously been applicants' priorities.

"They're setting a standard for at least the next four years," said Kirsten Mote, a planning consultant at Modern Mobility Partners in Atlanta. "They want to invest in projects that are going to benefit everybody."

Some Republicans in Congress have questioned Buttigieg's focus on the environment and racial equity. Rep. Garret Graves (R-La.), a transportation subcommittee leader, wrote to Buttigieg in March to say the changes to the INFRA program were not in line with the law that created it and would muddy its intended goal of aiding the economy.

"It is incredibly frustrating to see the apparent disregard for legal requirements in exchange for unquantifiable political objectives," Graves wrote.

The grants present the opportunity to carry out major projects that states and cities could not otherwise afford. Still, there are limits to how much influence the federal government can have through the programs. While INFRA and RAISE amount to about a combined \$2 billion a year, that is a small slice of the tens of billions in federal transportation spending that mostly flows to states through formulas set by Congress. Continue [HERE](#)

---

## Key Congressional Republican Calls for Bipartisan Highway Bill

[Eugene Mulero](#) April 15, 2021

As federal policymakers prepare to consider comprehensive highway policy legislation in the coming weeks, the top Republican on the U.S. Senate transportation committee reiterated calls for bipartisanship.

Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.), the ranking member on the Environment and Public Works Committee, signaled the possibility for the panel to produce a meaningful multiyear highway policy bill with input from members on both sides of the aisle.

The country's premier highway law expires in September.

For Republicans to back an update of that law, lawmakers would have to reconcile differences pertaining to policies, as well as funding.

### Infrastructure Stories

Top Republicans are insisting the legislation focus on repairing surface transportation corridors. Democrats in the House and Senate majorities say they intend to produce climate change-centric transportation legislation meant to modernize nearly every system of travel. Neither side has recently approved a method to fund transportation programs.

"We need the give and take of this bipartisan process to produce legislation that can make it to the president's desk," said Capito on April 14. "It will take work from all levels of government and the private sector to meet the nation's transportation infrastructure needs. We will have to take an all hands on deck approach."

Specifically, Capito is proposing a highway bill that primarily enhances mobility options for commuters, improves connectivity along freight corridors and emphasizes safety and resilience for transportation projects. She would support dedicating resources for enhancing technologies across sectors within the infrastructure spectrum. The senator also has acknowledged a need for ensuring long-term funding for the nation's highway system.

Capito's colleagues echoed her calls for updating the country's highway law. The panel's chairman, Sen. Tom Carper (D-Del.), said he intends to take up a highway policy measure in the near-term. Both Democrats and Republicans have been questioning the long-term viability of the Highway Trust Fund, an account that relies on revenue from the federal fuel tax.

The trust fund assists state transportation agencies with roads, bridges and transit. Revenue from the 24.4 cents-per-gallon diesel tax, and 18.4 cents-per-gallon gas tax that feed into the trust fund will be insufficient to cover upcoming obligations. Since 2008, the trust fund's revenue shortfalls have been covered via transfers from the general fund.

The EPW panel has been examining alternative user-based revenue streams meant to achieve sustainable funding for transportation programs. "We're told that the average number of years a vehicle has on the road is about 15 years, so we're going to be using gas and diesel for some time, but by less going forward," Carper told colleagues.

There's increasing attention devoted to the potential for adopting a national vehicle miles travel, or VMT, fee. The program would charge motorists for the miles they drive. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee ranking member Sam Graves (R-Mo.) champions a VMT system. As he put it, "Funding our infrastructure should not be a political battle. It's time to set a definitive path toward the long-term sustainability of the Highway Trust Fund, a path that is totally funded by all users of the system and not by insufficient gas taxes and deficit spending. This is how we realize the transformative projects everyone wants to accomplish."

Stakeholders continue to warn congressional leaders about the trust fund's looming shortfall. Douglas Shinkle, transportation program director at the National Conference of State Legislatures told senators on April 14: "Unless additional revenues or transfers are authorized, the [Highway Trust Fund] could diminish to the point that the U.S. Department of Transportation may have to delay payments to states for completed work. Late payments or reduced federal transportation spending to accommodate for the shortfall, is not an option for states."

The White House has dismissed raising fuel taxes as part of President Joe Biden's \$2.25 trillion infrastructure plan. The president proposed raising the corporate tax rate from 21% to 28% to fund significant portions of his plan.

"Fundamentally, he does not believe that paying for this historic investment in rebuilding our nation's infrastructure and creating millions of jobs should be on the backs of Americans," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki, referring to a recent meeting between the president and members of Congress. "So he doesn't believe that anyway; he's proposed his own means of paying for it. But he was using [the gas tax] as an example of how it wouldn't even make a sizable dent in paying for the package."

---

## Buttigieg casts proposed transportation budget as down payment on infrastructure

By [Ian Duncan](#) April 15, 2021

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg presented his department's budget to lawmakers Thursday as a miniature version of the administration's mammoth infrastructure plan, with new money for transit, rail and racial justice.

Buttigieg cast the spending as a down payment toward the \$2.25 trillion infrastructure package President Biden has outlined, calling the budget "a beginning on investments that we know we'll need to make on a larger order to really meet the moment."

The White House is also proposing a \$3.2 billion increase in the Transportation Department's discretionary budget to \$25.6 billion, a boost of about 14 percent.

Since Biden announced his infrastructure proposal last month, Buttigieg has been on a roadshow to market it in television interviews and private talks with lawmakers. He is part of a team of five Cabinet members the White House has tapped for the job.

Buttigieg told members of the House Appropriations Committee's transportation panel on Thursday that the proposal would give the nation an opportunity to rebound from the [coronavirus](#) pandemic.

“The American Jobs Plan will modernize how we travel, how we move goods, and how we live,” he said. “It will make transformative investments, turning shovel-worthy ideas into shovel-ready projects, and seeing them to completion.”

#### [Here's what's in Biden's budget proposal](#)

Republicans remain cool to the president's approach despite efforts to build bipartisan support. Several members of the committee questioned Buttigieg on the scope of the plan and whether it would centralize too much spending power in Washington.

“These numbers are big,” said Rep. Mike Garcia (R-Calif.) “These budgets that we're talking about are large. I think we've become a little numb to units of dollars that start with Ts.”

Before the hearing, a group of Senate Republicans held a news conference to say they were open to working with Democrats on infrastructure, but roundly criticized the breadth of the White House proposal. Several senators said they could support spending on transportation networks, drinking water and broadband — what they called “core infrastructure.”

Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.), her party's leader on the Environment and Public Works Committee, said she expected Republicans to set out their own vision as a starting point for negotiations with Biden.

“You heard our desire for something robust,” Capito said. “We understand it is a job creator and we understand we're behind.”

On Monday, Biden [said he was open to negotiating](#) and hosted a bipartisan group of lawmakers for talks on the plan.

Both the Obama and Trump administrations sought to craft major infrastructure packages without success. Rep. David E. Price (D-N.C.), the appropriations panel's chairman, asked Buttigieg why the current administration expects things to be different this time.

“This has been a decade-long, decade-plus, struggle to get this investment going,” Price said. “What is new now?”

Buttigieg said that the needs for new spending are clear, that there is bipartisan interest despite differences in the approach and that the economic situation presents an opportunity.

The department's annual budget proposal includes only a slice of the agency's funding, with much of it coming from the Highway Trust Fund and used to back state and local transportation projects. But within those confines, the administration is proposing additional funds for rail and transit.

Buttigieg said that despite uncertainty about what daily routines will look like after the pandemic, it would be important to improve the quality of transit service to boost economic opportunities in struggling communities and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

“As we look to the future, we're going to continue to see a need for Americans to have many options in terms of how they get to work, how they get to school, how they get around their community,” Buttigieg said.

The administration is proposing to fund its infrastructure package by increasing the corporate tax rate, which congressional Republicans cut in 2017. Capito said that she continued to support that tax cut and that raising the rate would cross “a nonnegotiable red line.”

Historically, much federal transportation spending has been funded using the gas tax. But the rate has not been raised since 1993, leaving inflation and gains in fuel efficiency to eat into its spending power.

On Tuesday, an array of transportation industry groups — including those representing state transportation officials, road-building companies and transit agencies — wrote to leaders of congressional committees that set transportation policy, urging them to support a nationwide fee on the number of miles people drive.

“American ingenuity and innovation stand ready to meet these challenges,” the groups wrote. “Congress has an extraordinary opportunity to create and test a much-needed long-term replacement for the user fees that we currently rely on to build our roads and bridges.”

---

## Joint Letter To Congress Calls For “Generational” Infrastructure Investment

[editor@aaashto.org](mailto:editor@aaashto.org) April 16, 2021

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials and 17 other organizations sent a [joint letter](#) to key Congressional leaders on April 15 calling for more funding to close a \$756 billion “investment gap” in the nation's surface transportation system.

“We request Congress to authorize \$200 billion in highway and bridge stimulus or ‘down payment’ in the infrastructure package, available to be obligated through 2026 at 100 percent federal share,” the letter said in reference to the recent American Jobs Plan stimulus unveiled by the Biden administration on [March 31](#).

“We also ask that you to provide \$487 billion for the Federal-aid Highway Program as part of the upcoming five-year surface transportation reauthorization due by October 1,” the letter continued. “If these robust investments are paired with \$846 billion in the subsequent five year reauthorization from 2027 to 2031, we as a nation can finally tackle the ever-looming highway and bridge backlog once and for all.”

The \$756 billion investment “backlog” figure cited by AASHTO in the joint letter is based on the methodology used in [Status of the Nation's Highways, Bridges, and Transit: Conditions & Performance Report, 23rd Edition](#) published by the US Department of Transportation — a backlog composed of system rehabilitation, enhancement, and capacity needs for highways and bridges.

Congress was also asked to use existing highway and transit formulas and existing rail grant programs to provide those requested funds, as long-standing [formula funding methodology](#) — used to disburse Highway Trust Fund revenues to the states — provide fiscal support “in the quickest and most efficient manner, all the while flowing to every part of the country.”

The letter noted that with a five-year obligation time those infrastructure package investments should be able to support programs and projects that generate the most benefits through the entire lifecycle of assets — ranging from routine improvements that can provide immediate economic stimulus to major improvements that can substantially transform the network.

Lastly, the letter's signatories asked that any infrastructure package funding should be provided at 100 percent federal share in order to "recognize the ongoing revenue losses" experienced by state DOTs and transit agencies due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Since the early response to the pandemic, state DOTs have faced severe losses in state transportation revenues as vehicle travel declined," noted Jim Tymon, AASHTO's executive director, in a [statement](#) issued in response to state DOTs receiving \$10 billion in long-awaited emergency aid from a \$900 billion [COVID-19 relief measure](#) passed by Congress in [December 2020](#).

"Furthermore, this timely federal support will help state DOTs to retain their institutional capacities and to be prepared to deliver future infrastructure investment driving economic recovery and growth

## Funding Opportunities

---

# Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) GRANTS

(deadline July 12, 2021)

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) today published a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) to apply for \$1 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 discretionary grant funding through the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grants. RAISE, formerly known as BUILD and TIGER, has awarded over \$8.935 billion in grants to projects in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico since 2009.

"In communities across the country, there is tremendous need for transportation projects that create high-quality jobs, improve safety, protect our environment, and generate equitable economic opportunity for all Americans," said U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg. "With RAISE grants, we are making those needed investments in our communities' future."

Projects for RAISE funding will be evaluated based on merit criteria that include safety, environmental sustainability, quality of life, economic competitiveness, state of good repair, innovation, and partnership. Within these criteria, the Department will prioritize projects that can demonstrate improvements to racial equity, reduce impacts of climate change and create good-paying jobs.

For this round of RAISE grants, the maximum grant award is \$25 million, and no more than \$100 million can be awarded to a single State, as specified in the appropriations act. Up to \$30 million will be awarded to planning grants, including at least \$10 million to Areas of Persistent Poverty.

To ensure that the benefits of infrastructure investments benefit communities large and small the Department will award an equitable amount, not to exceed half of funding, to projects located in urban and rural areas respectively.

The program is highly competitive with 680 projects funded out of over 9700 applications. It is one of the few DOT discretionary programs for which regional and local governments can directly compete for multimodal transportation funding.

To provide technical assistance to prospective applicants, DOT is hosting a series of webinars during the FY 2021 RAISE grant application process. To register for the webinars visit [www.transportation.gov/RAISEgrants/outreach](http://www.transportation.gov/RAISEgrants/outreach). The deadline to submit an application is July 12, 2021 at 5pm Eastern.

---

## Inside of Mobile URBAN AREA

### Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities

Program (Section 5310) FY 2021 Second Round <https://mobilempo.org/5310.html>

Applications Due Thursday, May 13th, 2021 by NOON

Links to Documents

[FY2021 Mobile Urban Area 5310 Guidelines Second Round](#)

[FY2021 Mobile Urban Area 5310 Application \(PDF\)](#)

[FY2021 Mobile Urban Area 5310 Application \(Word\)](#)

[HERE](#) for Presentation at the Information Session

---

## Outside of Mobile URBAN AREA

ALDOT FY-2022 SECTION 5310 NOTICE OF FUNDING AVAILABILITY

*This is for the Rural Areas of Baldwin, Escambia, and Mobile Counties and*

*the Eastern Shore MPO Urban Area*

### **ALDOT extending the deadline for submission of the FY 2022 5310 application**

The Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT), Local Transportation Bureau, is now accepting Applications for funding consideration through the Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) provides funding for transit services that assist the state's population of seniors and individuals with disabilities.

The following organizations are eligible to submit an application for the Section 5310 program:

1. Nonprofit organizations

2. Public bodies/Governmental Authorities that certify to the Governor that no nonprofit corporations or associations are readily available in the proposed area to provide the service
3. Public bodies/Governmental agencies approved by ALDOT to coordinate transit services for seniors and individuals with disabilities

Federal funds administered through ALDOT are only extended to agencies providing transit services in the small urban and rural areas of the State.

Available federal capital funds for the Section 5310 program are approximately \$ 1,162,225 for small urban areas and \$ 1,638,050 for rural areas. A local match of 20% is required.

The application package provides specific information on eligible activities and match. The Section 5310 application and the current State Management Plan can be found at: <https://www.dot.state.al.us/ltweb/transit/index.html>.

Applications are evaluated based on the following criteria: financial and management capability; need for service; utilization of requested service; proposed service characteristics; and service coordination. Projects funded through the Section 5310 Program must be derived from a locally developed, coordinated transit-human services transportation plan (“coordinated plan”).

Completed grant applications must be submitted to the designated Regional Planning Council (Council of Governments) in the respective geographic area of the state in which Section 5310 transportation services are proposed. Each Regional Planning Council must review grant applications to ensure compliance with federal coordination requirements prior to submitting applications they endorse to ALDOT. Only those grant applications formally submitted to the Regional Planning Councils for review will be considered for ALDOT funding.

The deadline for submitting applications to the Regional Planning Councils (Councils of Governments) is **5:00 P.M. on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021**. Councils of Governments who either apply directly for funding or who apply for funding on behalf of other entities/organizations must submit applications directly to ALDOT no later than **5:00 p.m. on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021**. **Applications received late will be returned.**

All applications will be reviewed, evaluated, prioritized, and approved by ALDOT before ALDOT develops and submits a consolidated ALDOT grant application to the FTA Region IV office for funding consideration.

If you have questions or comments concerning the grant application, or if information is needed in another language or alternative format, contact Kasey Rogers, ALDOT, Local Transportation Bureau, 1409 Coliseum Boulevard, Montgomery, AL 36110; (334) 242-6764.

ALDOT does not discriminate against any individual because of race, color, or national origin.

---

## **STATE TAP**

### **FY 2022 Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program Call for Applications (TAP)**(Deadline May 28,2021)

The Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) is soliciting applications for the Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program (TAP) for FY 2022

Info is on the ALDOT website.... <https://www.dot.state.al.us/ltweb/administration/memorandums.html>

The only significant change in this year’s program is that applications must be submitted electronically. As noted in the Application and Guidelines....

“ All applications **must be submitted electronically** no later than 5:00 pm on **May 28, 2021**. Applications should be sent to [tapapp@dot.state.al.us](mailto:tapapp@dot.state.al.us) as a .pdf file (25 mb max) with “**FY 2022 TAP Application – Sponsor Name**” in the subject line.

As stated last year, a sponsor with an active TAP project will not be eligible to receive a new TAP project until the existing project is authorized and let to contract. We hope this will do several things:

1. Encourage sponsors to complete projects in a timely manner;
2. Encourage sponsors to actually cancel projects that have major issues and will probably never get built;
3. Eliminate sponsors from transferring funds from one TAP project to another.

---

## **MPO TAP**

### **Mobile Urbanized AREA FY 2022 Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Announcement and Documents** deadline noon, Friday, May 14th, 2021

[Announcement](#)

[Instructions and Guidelines](#)

[Application](#)

[Ranking Process](#)

For information regarding the FY 2022 Mobile Urbanized Area Call For Projects please contact:

Mr. Tom Piper

[tpiper@sarpc.org](mailto:tpiper@sarpc.org)

(251)706-4622

#### **ELIGIBLE ITEMS**

- Streetscape Improvements are eligible and should include items such as sidewalk replacement, landscaping, pedestrian lighting, etc. These enhancements must be located in the downtown area (central business district in front of store fronts). This is the only instance where replacement of deteriorated sidewalks is an eligible item.
- Curb Cut -to achieve ADA compliance.
- Lighting when it is decorative landscape or pedestrian lighting. Lighting is limited to 30%of the project cost. ·

- Landscaping as included in a streetscape project.
- Signs if there is a direct relationship to the project: Examples include historic interpretation or destination/distance/direction signs.
- Fencing for safety purposes only.
- Paving is approved on a case-by-case basis for repair of a street that may have been unavoidably damaged in the course of the enhancement project.
- Historic streets may be restored or preserved.
- Drainage is approved on a case-by-case basis where it is required for construction of the project. Drainage is limited to a small percentage of the overall project.
- Project Oversight- Construction engineering and inspection: Examples include: certified concrete, architectural, landscaping, and construction inspection, etc. Oversight is limited to 15% of the project cost. If the sponsor chooses to hire a consultant for project oversight, they must follow ALDOT's latest consultant selection procedures.

---

## 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.

---

## 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.

---

### [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](#)

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)

---

### HOW BORING...

Seattle, WA this week had a contest to name their new tunnel boring machine. Of the 35,000 votes cast, the name chosen was .... Mudhoney. Mudhoney climbed to the top of the pile among 1,200 naming suggestions, which included finalists Daphne, Molly the Mole, Boris the Plunger and Sir Digs-A-Lot. [HERE](#)



*Just For Fun*, IF South Alabamians had a contest in the 1970's to name such a machine for the Wallace Tunnels, what would some of the contestants be? The Electro to the Metro? Baldwin Commuter Crater Creator? No Toll Hole Maker? The Bienville Thrill Drill? The REAL mud slinger?

## In the News

### Truck bridge' concept in jeopardy, Baldwin officials reconsider full bridge and bayway package

Posted by [Gabriel Tynes](#) | Apr 15, 2021

The Eastern Shore Metropolitan Planning Organization (ESMPO), the same group that effectively killed the \$2.1 billion Mobile River Bridge and Bayway Project in August 2019, may be looking to revive it. During a work session Wednesday, the panel discussed the inadequacies of the newest plan for [a \\$725 million truck-only bridge](#), arguing its phased approach may create more problems than it alleviates.

Baldwin County Commissioner Joe Davis, a resident of Daphne, said Phase 1 of the proposed truck bridge will simply shift the Interstate 10 bottleneck from the Wallace Tunnel to Exit 35 at Highway 98, where the proposed three lanes of traffic from the eastbound Bayway will merge again to two. Earlier this year, in a separate proposal from the truck bridge, the ESMPO endorsed a project to widen Interstate 10 to six lanes between the Bayway and State Route 181 in Malbis, but neither project redesigns or reconfigures Exit 35.

"[ALDOT] said the numbers support six lanes right now at Exit 35," Davis said. "We need a plan to make it more viable ... Exit 35 has challenges right now and I would like us to consider asking the state, the federal government, whoever, to take Exit 35 East into consideration and it be done concurrently with this bridge."

On March 22, representatives of ESMPO, the Mobile Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Alabama Department of Transportation held a news conference to announce the revival of the Mobile River bridge project, endorsing an approach that would initially construct a single span of the bridge for trucks only, then, in an indeterminate time in the future, raise the Bayway and add a second span. Officials said the plan would preserve a \$150 million federal grant set to expire in 2022, while a toll of less than \$15 per truck could provide as much as \$400 million to pay toward construction.

Fairhope City Council President Jack Burrell, chairman of the ESMPO, who appeared alongside Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson to endorse the truck bridge last month, said he's had a few weeks to reflect on the plan he and now believes there's a more feasible way to deliver the full bridge and bayway package in a single phase.

"There's been a lot of talk about the \$725 million (truck bridge) plan," Burrell said. "Everybody knows that's only Phase 1 and there will ultimately be Phase 2 and Phase 3. The more I look at this ... I agree 100 percent ... the only thing that makes sense is to go back to having all this performed at once because we are going to run into nightmares if we don't."

Burrell recalled the original \$2.1 billion project — a public-private partnership — [was removed from the ESMPO's Transportation Improvement Plan](#) in the wake of "citizen outrage at the tolls." At one time, ALDOT recommended tolls as high as \$6 for passenger cars each way, with a \$90 monthly pass for commuters and a guarantee at least one route — the Causeway, Bankhead Tunnel and Cochrane-Africatown Bridge — would remain free. ALDOT and Gov. Kay Ivey advised local leaders to formulate a new plan, and they returned with the truck bridge concept this year.

But Burrell said he has since "put pen to paper," and suggested that if the federal government will loan the state money to pay for the project rather than a private party, "if you get the profiteers out of the way, you start saving a lot of money." The Biden Administration is currently seeking support for a \$2 trillion national infrastructure package, and regardless of its merits, local leaders are looking at a potential windfall from either federal line items or earmarks.

Burrell said assuming the federal government will provide a favorable interest rate on a \$1.75 billion loan, a two-span bridge and raised Bayway could be constructed in a single project — along with the reconfiguration of Exit 35 — and suggested drivers will be happy to pay a toll of what could be less than \$2 for passenger vehicles.

"If a toll is low enough, maybe they won't take the free route," he said. "The question is, how much traffic would we lose to free routes? I think there is a good possibility we can make these numbers work but there are some big assumptions. Primarily, would the federal government loan us the money?"

Daphne Mayor Robin Lejeune, Spanish Fort Mayor Mike McMillan, Fairhope Mayor Sherry Sullivan and Baldwin County Commissioner Billie Jo Underwood were also in attendance, and encouraged Burrell to speak with Stimpson about a broader proposal. McMillan expressed concern about the longevity of the existing Bayway, and the amount of traffic that could potentially be diverted the Causeway. Before the project can request funding, both MPOs must add it to their long-range transportation plans and transportation improvement plans, which would require public comment.

ALDOT engineer Edwin Perry said the biggest challenge of the project has been funding, but the state "wants to be able to work with both MPOs on whatever you're willing to support."

"Being able to toll a wider audience helps fund the project," he said. "The more revenue that comes in, the more [project] may be built. Giving passenger cars the option to pay, maybe we're able to do this in two phases, or one phase and a piece. It's something we have to look at."

On Thursday, Wiley Blankenship of the Coastal Alabama Partnership and Build the Bridge Coalition said he was "surprised a little bit" by both the truck bridge proposal and the news from the ESMPO yesterday. He said all alternatives have previously been studied, but changes in the Biden Administration "might change some things greatly."

Blankenship said Sen. Richard Shelby suggested Congress may lift its ban on earmarks, and the Mobile River bridge proposal would be a valuable project for the chairman of the Senate Committee on Appropriations to bargain with. But either way, Blankenship said regional and state leaders need to have a proposal on the table to apply for the money the moment it is available.

"I think anytime anybody has a viable project and it's feasible, it needs to be heard and listened to," he said. "But there's a lot up in the air, and you better have something going if you want to get those dollars ... the project needs to be moving."

Stimpson was out of town and couldn't immediately be reached for comment.

---

## FAA approves downtown commercial airport plan

Posted by [Dale Liesch](#) | Apr 14, 2021

A downtown commercial airport with international capacity is one step closer to reality with the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) approval of the Mobile Airport Authority's (MAA) master plan, MAA President Chris Curry confirmed to Lagniappe.

The approval, which is a planning tool for FAA funding, gives the authority a "green light" to move forward with its plans, Curry said. "It doesn't guarantee funding, but it is a tool," he said.

To fund the entire list of projects in its master plan, the MAA would need about \$403 million over 20 years, Curry said. The FAA could fund as much as 90 percent of the total of at least some of those projects, he said.

"Some would be funded at a 100 percent local rate," Curry said. "It's hard to say how much we could get from [the FAA] in the next 20 years. The majority of the projects in the master plan would be funded more by the FAA."

The most important project on the list, Curry said, is construction of a new terminal at Brookley Aeroplex, which would allow MAA to move commercial service from Mobile Regional Airport at Bates Field.

The plan initially called for two terminals — one for low-cost airlines and one for legacy carriers like Delta and United. However, Curry said MAA might go with one instead, possibly abandoning its current downtown terminal for a newer version. Although, he said, two terminals could still be part of the plan.

"We haven't decided if the temporary terminal will exist as a terminal," he said.

Other crucial aspects of the master plan include land acquisition and relocation of a fire station. Curry expects to move commercial service in 2024, depending on what "local hurdles" need to be cleared.

"At the end of the day, the eventual move is to facilitate and take advantage of the proximity to the port," Curry said. "At the end of the day, we want the master plan projects to provide benefits we can take advantage of."

### Low-cost

### carriers

One issue MAA is dealing with is its inability to lure low-cost carriers to Mobile. One of the advantages of the current downtown terminal was to provide distance between bargain carriers and legacy airlines. At first, it seemed successful; MAA was able to lure Via and Frontier Airlines with the promise of a downtown terminal. However, after a string of issues at the regional airport, Via never actually flew out of the downtown terminal, and while Frontier eventually did, its initial services to Chicago and Denver were dropped. A later iteration of Frontier service to Orlando was introduced but was also abandoned by the company.

Curry said an issue for MAA in luring these low-cost carriers at the moment is an increased focus from the companies on leisure travel, which is not something that attracts too many folks to the city right now.

---

# Domino's is launching a pizza delivery robot car

BY ALEXIS BENVENISTE, CNN BUSINESS

UPDATED APR 12, 2021 | POSTED ON APR 12, 2021



Domino's is launching a pizza delivery robot car

This week, Domino's is rolling out a robot car delivery service to select customers in Houston.

(CNN) -- The robots are coming, and they're bringing pizza.

This week, Domino's is rolling out a robot car delivery service to select customers in Houston. For those who opt in, their pies will arrive in a fully autonomous vehicle made by Nuro.

Here's how it works: Customers in the Woodland Heights neighborhood of Houston can choose robot delivery and receive texts with updates on the car's location and a numerical code that can be used to retrieve the order. Once the car arrives, the customer enters the number on the bot's touchscreen, and the car doors open up to serve the food.

Nuro's robot car was the first completely autonomous, human-free on-road delivery vehicle to receive regulatory approval from the US Department of Transportation last year, Domino's said.

This isn't Domino's first foray into the world of autonomous deliveries. In 2017, the Michigan-based company used a self-driving Ford Fusion hybrid to deliver pizzas to randomly chosen customers in Ann Arbor, Michigan. And in 2013, Domino's tested out pizza delivery via drone in the United Kingdom.

While these experiments are useful to get the ball rolling when it comes to innovation and building buzz for the brand, consumers shouldn't expect a seismic shift in the way food is delivered. For now, at least.

"There is still so much for our brand to learn about the autonomous delivery space," Dennis Maloney, Domino's senior vice president and chief innovation officer, said of the new initiative. "This program will allow us to better understand how customers respond to the deliveries, how they interact with the robot and how it affects store operations."

Domino's isn't the first pizza chain to play around with this technology. In 2018, Pizza Hut announced that it was working with Toyota to release a fully autonomous delivery vehicle.

But self-driving vehicles are far from mainstream. For years, self-driving car companies operated under the belief that their technology and current road infrastructure would be enough. But self-driving has proved harder to get off the ground than expected. Companies have missed deadlines for deployments, and the industry has consolidated, with even a company as big as Uber selling its self-driving vehicle program.

## Transportation Research

### Fact Sheet: U.S. Department of Transportation Details the American Rescue Plan's Benefits for Transportation

The U.S. Department of Transportation highlights the transportation elements of the historic American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP), which will provide immediate relief for American workers, help communities that are struggling in the wake of COVID-19, and ensure that our transportation system keeps running. ARP includes a total of \$43.2 billion in resources for the Department to continue its response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. ARP contains relief funding for surface transportation in two main categories: Transit and Amtrak. For transit, ARP contains \$30.5 billion to assist with operating costs, including payroll and PPE expenses. This includes dedicated funds to support rural transit agencies, transit service for the elderly and individuals with disabilities, and transit on Tribal lands. For Amtrak, ARP contains \$1.7 billion to recall employees furloughed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, restore daily long-distance service, and help states cover lost revenue in state-supported routes. For further details click [HERE](#).

### URBAN AREA and MSA CRITERIA PROPOSED CHANGE

On February 19, 2021, the U.S. Census Bureau published a Federal Register notice that provided the Bureau's proposed criteria for defining urban areas based on the results of the 2020 Decennial Census. The U.S. Census Bureau is requesting public comment on the proposed criteria with written comments to be submitted on or before May 20, 2021. After the public comment period has closed, the U.S. Census Bureau will publish another Federal Register notice to provide the final criteria for defining urban areas.

The Federal Register notice for MSA change is available [HERE](#). Urban AREA [HERE](#) It provides a description of the changes from the final criteria used for the 2010 Census, including:

- \* Adoption of a housing unit density threshold for qualification of census blocks,
- \* Qualify urban areas based on a minimum threshold of 4,000 housing units or 10,000 persons instead of a minimum threshold of 2,500 persons,
- \* Cease distinguishing different types of urban areas,
- \* Maximum distances of jumps,
- \* No longer include the low density hop or jump “corridor” in the urban area,
- \* No longer include low-density territory located within indentations formed during the urban area delineation process, and
- \* Splitting of large agglomerations of densely settled territory.

## OMB introduces proposed changes to MSA Criteria

### Changes in MSA Designations: Potential Impact on Alabama Regions

#### Background

The U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Census Bureau each use different methods to provide federal statistics and data on population density across the United States. The Census Bureau focuses on creating an urban versus rural distinction based on population density and distance from a “core” dense populated area, while the OMB groups highly-integrated areas into metropolitan versus non-metropolitan categories that can potentially encompass both urban and rural lands. The OMB ultimately uses the Census Bureau’s urban classification system to determine micropolitan and metropolitan statistical areas.

The general concept of a metropolitan statistical area (MSA) is that of an area containing a large population nucleus and adjacent communities that have a high degree of integration with that nucleus. Currently, an MSA consists of one or more counties that contain a city of 50,000 or more inhabitants, a standard which has been in place since 1950. Counties that contain the principal concentration of population are components of the MSA, while additional counties can qualify to be included in the area by meeting both a specified level of commuting to the main counties and other urban population statistics.

#### Proposed Changes

The OMB periodically reviews the standards used to make MSA determinations, and recommends changes when the review committee believes standards are outdated. In early 2021, the committee recommended the following change in regard to MSA designations:

(1) The minimum urban area population to qualify a metropolitan statistical area should be increased from 50,000 to 100,000.

If this change is adopted, it could mean that seven areas in Alabama currently designated as MSAs would lose that standing. Anniston-Oxford, Auburn-Opelika, Daphne-Fairhope-Foley, Decatur, Dothan, Florence-Muscle Shoals, and Gadsden all have populations between 50,000 and 100,000, meaning they would fall short of the new threshold for MSA status. The same is true for 137 other cities across the United States, many of which are voicing opposition to the proposed change.

What all would be affected by a loss of MSA status remains unclear for most cities. The OMB overtly states that it “does not take into account or attempt to anticipate any public or private sector nonstatistical uses” that come from its designations, and that MSAs “are not designed to serve as a general-purpose geographic framework applicable for nonstatistical activities or for use in program funding formulas.”

However, the Census Bureau included in its proposed changes a recognition that “some federal and state agencies use the Census Bureau’s urban area classification for nonstatistical uses such as allocating program funds, setting program standards, and implementing aspects of their programs,” and warned that those agencies “should be aware that the changes to the urban area criteria also might affect the implementation of their programs.” In short, funding could be on the line.

#### Funding Impacts

Some communities at risk of losing their MSA designation are concerned that they will lose opportunities to obtain federal funding. Communities currently designated as an MSA are not the only ones that could be impacted by the proposed changes. Some rural areas are also concerned that with more micropolitan areas there will be increased competition for federal funding that is designated for rural areas. Several federal funding and grant provisions that take MSA status into account for allocations include:

- *Housing Opportunities for Persons with Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome* (42 USCS § 12903)
- *Rural Emergency Medical Service Training and Equipment Assistance Program* (42 USCS § 254c-15)
- *Rural Housing Stability Grant Program* (42 USCS § 11408)
- *Urban Development Action Grants* (42 USCS § 5318)
- *Assistance with Respect to Housing for Low and Moderate Income Families* (12 USCS § 1701x)
- *Grants to Improve the Commercial Value of Forest Biomass for Electric Energy, Useful Heat, Transportation Fuels, and other Commercial Purposes* (42 USCS § 15855)

Other federal policies and regulations that consider MSA designations include:

- *Hazardous Air Pollutants* (42 USCS § 7412)
- *Payments to Hospitals for Inpatient Hospital Services* (42 USCS § 1395ww)
- *Designation of Enterprise Zones* (42 USCS § 11501)
- *Minimum Federal Fleet Requirements* (42 USCS § 13212)
- *Access to Broadband Telecommunications Services in Rural Areas* (7 USCS § 950bb)
- *Air Traffic Controllers* (49 USCS § 44506)

## 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.

