



Transportation Friday

An electronic newsletter concerning regional transportation issues

Friday, November 12th, 2021

Volume 40, Number 7

In This Issue

[MOBILE MPO UPDATES](#)

[SOUTH ALABAMA RPO UPDATES](#)

[PROJECTS LET DECEMBER 3rd, 2021](#)

[LEGISLATIVE UPDATES](#)

[FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES](#)

[JUST FOR FUN](#)

[IN THE NEWS](#)

[TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH](#)

Contact Us

<http://www.mobilempo.org>
transportation@sarpc.org

Kevin Harrison, PTP
Director of Transportation
kharrison@sarpc.org

Tom Piper
Sr Transportation Planner
tpiper@sarpc.org

Monica Williamson
Transportation Planner
mwilliamson@sarpc.org

Anthony Johnson
Transportation Planner
ajohnson@sarpc.org

John F. "Rickey" Rhodes
SARPC Executive Director
rrhodes@sarpc.org

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

ATRIP-II deadline is looming in *Funding Opportunities*. The Infrastructure Bill will be signed by the President this coming Monday. What is in it? See *Legislative Updates*, and *In The News* this week, what is in it for Alabama? Plus *In The News*, an interesting opinion on tolls, and Amtrak. This week's *Just For Fun* is an ode to the very first auto mechanic; it might surprise you. Have a great weekend!

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

www.mobilempo.org



Check us out on FACEBOOK; SARPC Transportation Video, this is what we do [HERE](#)

Want to know what other SARPC departments do?

- [Planning and Community Development](#)
- [Area Agency on Aging](#)
- [Employment and Economic Development](#)

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

Mobile MPO Updates

Mobile Area Major Road Plan

The Steering Committee met last week to talk about next steps in the planning process. Some topics discussed included identifying which municipalities have complete Streets requirements, and how to best go about identifying underground utilities and stormwater systems. The consultant and MPO Staff will be setting up individual meetings with leaders from each municipalities in the coming weeks to discuss the plan.

The Plan is for better integration and connectivity of land use and transportation planning, to ensure existing and future on-system corridors are managed and/or preserved as part of the long-range comprehensive planning efforts and as development occurs. A complete Major Road Plan to include regulatory components, current practices, case studies, and guidance for Mobile County and Municipalities within Mobile County. The Plan will include methods and tools for acquiring and preserving right-of-way in the context of expediting the environmental clearance process and review how corridors are prioritized, designated, and adopted for management or preservation. This will require coordination with all planning jurisdictions in Mobile County.

Phase One of the I-10 Mobile River Bridge and Bayway project are added to LRTP and TIP

On September 1st, 2021, a letter was submitted to ALDOT from both the Eastern Shore MPO and the Mobile MPO, requesting that ALDOT investigate the possibilities of building the project in less than the three phases.

ALDOT has agreed to provide formal updates to both MPO's every two months. The first Update was held July 27th, 2021 at Five Rivers, and the second update was on September 20th, at Five Rivers at 2:00PM in the Theater. The next joint update is to be determined. The slide presentation can be found [HERE](#). The Mobile MPO will house all of the slide presentations from these ALDOT Updates at www.mobilempo.org.

The next step is that ALDOT will authorize the Preliminary Engineering (PE) that was approved as part of the project, and begin a Toll and Revenue Study to further hone in on potential tolling revenues. These tolling revenues will not be from just trucks, but voluntary vehicles willing to pay the toll as well; all legacy routes will remain free.

Moving forward, at a minimum, we have a way to build a bridge. The federal government, federal legislature, and new administration are currently developing numerous bills that potentially may help us move past this "at a minimum" scenario.

[HERE](#) is the Amendment with update Section 1.7 that summarizes the public comments.

[HERE](#) is APPENDIX A with all of the comments we received prior to deadline

[HERE](#) is a National Geographic article on Africatown that was presented as information.

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

LINK TO MAP [HERE](#)

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 resurfacing program. This funding can be 100% federal funding with no matching requirements; this presents a rare opportunity for the Mobile MPO.

The cities of Creola, Satsuma, Saraland, Chickasaw, Prichard, Semmes and Bayou la Batre have provided a prioritized list of roads that need to be resurfaced within their jurisdiction. The PE projects (design projects) were sent to FHWA for fund authorization.

Neel Shafer received the Notice To Proceed earlier this week on the following seven Projects listed below:

CRSAMB-4921(251)	\$27,420.00
CRSAMB-4921(252)	\$32,285.00
CRSAMB-4921(253)	\$31,456.00
CRSAMB-4921(254)	\$65,000.00
CRSAMB-4921(255)	\$53,492.00
CRSAMB-4921(256)	\$31,124.00
CRSAMB-4921(257)	\$37,828.00

Soon, the cities will begin to see activities in terms of some survey work, geotechnical work, etc.. on the streets proposed for resurfacing. Also, Neel Shafer will soon begin the process of reaching out and working with the cities to provide the necessary documents required for the federal funds to be spent. This include documents such as the ROW certification, encroachment notices, etc...

As of now, due to the scope of these projects, the proposed letting date is sometime late spring/early summer in 2022, assuming no issues with the city certifications, etc.

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

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 MPO

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

South Alabama RPO Updates

The South Alabama Rural Planning Organization met recently using the GoToMeeting app.

One item on the [agenda](#) was to amend the [Fiscal Year 2021 Work Program](#) to include assisting ALDOT by facilitating the public involvement process for ALDOT's draft Public Involvement Plan for Statewide Transportation Planning.

The purpose of the plan is to implement effective ways for ALDOT to gather information from the public about their transportation needs. The plan is available on ALDOT's website. All comments must be received on or before October 4, 2021.

ALDOT's Draft PIP is posted here:

<https://www.dot.state.al.us/news/publicinvolvement.html>.

Other items on the [agenda](#) included:

- Approve the [minutes of the previous RPO meeting](#)
- Review and Adopt the [Fiscal Year 2022 Work Program](#) which includes a new task of assisting ALDOT by hosting public meetings for the Statewide Long Range Transportation Process
- Amend the [RPO's Public Involvement Procedures](#) to include online virtual meetings when necessary
- Amend the [Annual Transportation Plan List of Projects](#)

RPO Staff is working to finalizing the RPO Transportation Plan. We're also building an online interactive map of all of the RPO projects. Once it's complete we will send out a link to all the RPO members and they'll be able to reference it for grant applications and the like.

Projects in Region To Be Let December 3rd , 2021

For constructing the Safety Widening, Planing, Resurfacing, Steel Blockout Replacement, and Traffic Stripe on I-65 (Service Roads) from the SR-16 (US-90) Interchange in Mobile to the SR-17 (US-45) Interchange in Prichard. Length 12.997 mi. The Bracket Estimate on this project is from \$2,940,239 to \$3,593,625 .

BALDWIN COUNTY

For constructing the Connector Road (Grading, Drainage, Pavement, Bridge, Fence Installation, Traffic Lighting, and Traffic Stripe) on SR-161 from the junction SR-180 to a point north of the junction of CR-4 (Cotton Creek Drive) in Gulf Shores. Length 1.078 mi. The Bracket Estimate on this project is from \$35,636,838 to \$43,556,135 .

ESCAMBIA COUNTY

None at this time

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

Legislative Updates

Biden to sign \$1 trillion infrastructure bill on Monday

WED, NOV 10 2021 BY Thomas Franck and Jacob Pramuk

KEY POINTS

- President Joe Biden will sign into law the largest federal investment in infrastructure in more than a decade.
- In a statement, the administration said Biden will be joined in a signing ceremony by members of Congress who helped write the \$1 trillion piece of legislation.
- Biden's signature will make the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act law 10 days after the House passed the bipartisan piece of legislation.

The White House announced Wednesday that President Joe Biden will on Monday sign into law the largest federal investment in infrastructure in more than a decade.

In a statement, the administration said Biden will be joined in a signing ceremony by members of Congress who helped write the \$1 trillion piece of legislation to improve the nation's roads, bridges and waterways.

"The President will highlight how he is following through on his commitment to rebuild the middle class and the historic benefits the Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal will deliver for American families," the White House said in a press release.

Namely, "millions of good-paying, union jobs for working people, improvements in our ports and transportation systems that strengthen supply chains, high-speed internet for every American, clean water for all children and families, the biggest investments in our roads and bridges in generations, the most significant investment in mass transit ever, and unprecedented investments in clean energy infrastructure."

Biden's signature will make the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act law 10 days after the House passed the bipartisan piece of legislation.

The legislation includes about \$550 billion in new funding for transportation, utilities and broadband. It also invests \$110 billion into roads, bridges and other major projects, directs \$66 billion toward passenger and freight rail and \$39 billion into public transit.

The bill will invest \$65 billion in expanding broadband access. It will put \$55 billion into water systems, including lead pipe replacements. The legislation also includes a provision for cryptocurrency tax reporting.

Lawmakers have tried and failed for years to pass such a comprehensive bill to upgrade the nation's utilities and surface transportation infrastructure. The White House and many other leading Democrats say the bill will ease pesky supply-chain disruptions and keep prices from soaring even higher.

While 13 House Republicans helped the bill clear the chamber last week, its fate had been uncertain for much of the fall. Fierce debate between progressive and centrist Democrats, which centered on the bill's passage in tandem with the separate Build Back Better plan, threatened to derail the infrastructure plan.

Ultimately, progressives accepted promises from centrists that they would support the \$1.75 trillion social safety net and climate package when it comes up for a vote. Centrists asked to delay the Build Back Better vote until they are able to review the Congressional Budget Office's estimates of the plan's budgetary impact.

Unlike the infrastructure package, the Build Back Better bill is opposed by virtually every Republican on Capitol Hill. Democrats will attempt to circumvent a GOP filibuster in the evenly split Senate using a special budgetary rule known as reconciliation that will allow the party to muscle the legislation through with a simple majority vote.

Fact Sheet: What the Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal Will Mean for American Mobility

Wednesday, November 10, 2021

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal is a generational investment in America's transportation network. It will allow the nation to modernize its infrastructure, making it safer and more resilient. It will make our transportation systems more equitable and help fight climate change. It will create hundreds of thousands of good paying jobs and lay the foundation for America to compete and win in the 21st century.

Fact Sheet: What the Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal Will Mean for American Mobility

- The U.S. Department of Transportation stands ready to implement the Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal and help States, counties, local governments, transit agencies, rail operators, airport and ports:

- Reduce the backlog for major repairs for highways and bridges by almost 20%
- Spur the creation of a nation-wide network of 500,000 EV chargers by 2030 including a special program for smaller and underserved communities
- Fix up to 10 of the most economically significant bridges in the nation, and repair over 15,000 smaller bridges across the country
- Reconnect as many as 20 communities by removing portions of interstates, redesigning rural main streets and repurposing former rail lines
- Increase the number of communities that have strategies to reduce traffic fatalities and interventions that prevent death and serious injuries
- End growth in the national transit maintenance backlog, reduce the current backlog by 15% and replace more than 1,700 aging subway, light rail, and commuter rail cars
- Replace over 10,000 fossil-fuel powered transit vehicles with cleaner electric or low emission transit vehicles
- Boost transit funding for communities all over the country by an average of 30% – allowing for communities to address maintenance backlogs, modernization and expansion
- Fund replacement of Amtrak railcars, including ones that are nearly a half-century-old, with state-of-the-art trains on routes that account for nearly half of Amtrak’s annual ridership
- Fund major bridge and tunnel replacement projects along the Northeast Corridor, which today is served by infrastructure, some of which dates back to the Civil War
- Put the Northeast Corridor states on track for their goal to save nearly 30 minutes in travel time each between New York City and D.C. and Boston and New York City
- Nearly cut in half the \$43.6B backlog of airport modernization and safety projects identified by the FAA
- Replace up to 100 control towers at regional and municipal airports across the United States in the next decade
- Double investments in ports to help alleviate bottlenecks and increase sustainability
- Strengthen supply chains by investing almost \$50 billion in our ports and airports on top of expanding existing programs that support freight investment across modes

House passes Biden’s \$1T Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

BY LIZ CAREY | NOVEMBER 8, 2021

Late Friday night, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, called a “once-in-a-generation investment” into the country’s infrastructure by President Joe Biden’s administration.

The bill passed by a vote of 228-to-206, with 19 members, including six Democrats, voting against their party, fulfilling Biden’s promise to get bipartisan support for the bill.

“This Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal will rebuild America’s roads and bridges, deliver clean drinking water to every household... will rebuild America’s roads, bridges, and rails, expand access to clean drinking water, ensure every American has access to high-speed internet, tackle the climate crisis, advance environmental justice, and invest in communities that have too often been left behind,” the White House said in a statement. “The legislation will help ease inflationary pressures and strengthen supply chains by making long-overdue improvements for our nation’s ports, airports, rail, and roads. It will drive the creation of good-paying union jobs and grow the economy sustainably and equitably so that everyone gets ahead for decades to come. Combined with the President’s Build Back Framework, it will add on average 1.5 million jobs per year for the next 10 years.”

The bill adds \$559 billion to the federal government’s average annual infrastructure investment of \$650 billion and addresses surface transportation reauthorization, water resiliency, emergency management, and other infrastructure priorities. Included in the bill are a \$273.2 billion increase in the federal highway programs over the next five years; \$11 billion for road safety; \$7.3 billion for the new Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient and Cost-saving Transportation (PROTECT) program design to make infrastructure more resilient to climate change; \$55 billion for water and wastewater infrastructure; \$66 billion for passenger and freight rail; \$65 billion for broadband infrastructure; \$39.2 billion for public transit; and \$7.5 billion for electric vehicle charging infrastructure, among other things.

Passage of the bill was quickly met with widespread approval.

“The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is the most significant measure in more than 50 years to meaningfully address the condition and performance of the U.S. transportation network,” said American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA) President & CEO Dave Bauer in a statement. “Members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives have demonstrated not only the importance of federal transportation infrastructure leadership but that policymakers can find common ground and govern on matters of national concern... In today’s political environment where distortions and broadsides masquerade as solutions, members of Congress have taken tangible action that will benefit every state and community across the nation.”

Within minutes of the bill’s passage, the American Public Works Association (APWA) said it applauded the move and commended Congress for taking historic steps toward improving American’s quality of life.

“Congress’ long-awaited approval of IJA today is welcomed and applauded across the country by public works professionals,” said APWA President Stan Brown. “From 2003 to 2017, federal infrastructure spending dropped more than 20 percent and negatively affected those who rely on our highways, roads, bridges, transit, and water and wastewater systems.”

Amtrak, which is slated to receive \$66 billion in new money, allowing the rail line to build onto its existing service along the Northeast Corridor as well as in Colorado and the Midwest, said the bill would allow it to bring rail service to more Americans.

“Passenger rail offers the transportation solutions this country needs, and Amtrak is ready to make it happen,” Amtrak CEO Bill Flynn said in a statement. “This bill will allow Amtrak to advance significant infrastructure and major station projects on the NEC, purchase new passenger rail equipment, and develop new rail corridors, bringing passenger rail to more people across the nation. As demonstrated by their commitment to rail in this bill, President Biden and Congress believe in the future of rail and Amtrak, and we will move quickly to advance these projects.”

Airline industry advocacy groups also heralded the bill’s passage, which includes \$25 billion for airport maintenance and improvements.

“As millions of Americans prepare to ‘pack their patience’ and gear-up for Holiday travel, they can add in a large helping of gratitude as Congress has FINALLY passed a long-overdue and very much needed infrastructure bill, ensuring billions of dollars of airport projects can move forward without undue delay,” American Association of Airport Executives President and CEO Todd Hauptli said in a statement. “These projects will benefit travelers, workers, and communities across the country. Nothing is easy in Washington these days, but concrete knows no political affiliation. This is a win for all Americans.”

Funding Opportunities

ATRIP-II Funding Announcement

Grants to Alabama local government agencies to enhance public transportation, improve public safety, and promote economic development has been announced for Fiscal Year 2022. Funding is intended to upgrade and renovate transportation infrastructure through projects of local interest related to the state-maintained highway system. Projects may include local roads and bridges essential to such projects.

The program's goal is to address critical projects across the state to rehabilitate and improve the in-place facilities and in some cases provide new facilities at locations throughout the state. The program's focus is an emphasis on the public safety, economic growth, and stability of the state and its roads and bridges.

Project deliverability issues include, but are not limited to, design, environmental, right-of-way acquisition, cost, or other factors that could affect or impede project timeframe and advancement consistent with program goals will be considered during application evaluation. When provided, the ATRIP-II Committee will appraise and consider coordination by local government sponsors that reflect racial and ethnic diversity.

For application and information about allowable costs see: <https://www.dot.state.al.us/programs/ATRIPII.html>. The deadline for the application is November 19, 2021.

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.

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

[Baby you can drive my car...](#)

It is a little known, interesting fact, that the very first car was invented by Carl Benz, AND his wife Bertha. She was one smart woman, in an era and country that had not.... progressed yet. She had much to do with the invention, and actually took it on the first test ride without Carl's consent. On August 5th, 1888, she “borrowed” her husband's car to go visit her parents.

On her 67 mile journey, things went wrong on the prototype of the horseless carriage, and she became the very first auto mechanic. The brakes over heated and failed, so she used leather for the first brake pads. The spark plug over heated so she used her garter to insulate the spark plug, and she used her hair pin to unclog the fuel line. The fuel at the time could only be bought at a pharmacist, since it was a “cleaning agent”. She had routed her trip to visit various pharmacists. When she returned, Carl was thrilled that his smart business partner and wife, had completed and the made journey; he also wanted to know if she picked up any beer. [HERE](#)



In the News

Shrugs and intrigue: Alabama reacts to billions of dollars it will get in federal infrastructure package

Updated: Nov. 11, 2021

By John Sharp

A \$1.2 trillion federal infrastructure package approved by Congress on Friday is touted as a historic investment in roads, bridges, rails, and ports unseen in the U.S. in about a century.

But in Alabama, the reaction from the state, cities, counties, airport authorities, and transportation planners is mostly muted. Officials are unsure what the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) means for Alabama, and what kind of projects – big, small, or a combination of both – will receive federal funding.

The common answer from public officials over the past couple of days can be summed up by the following: “It’s too early to tell.”

“We expect to see an increase in federal funding, but just how much, how it can be used, and particularly what restrictions there might be, all remains to be seen,” said Tony Harris, spokesman with the Alabama Department of Transportation.

At the same time, local officials are starting to prepare for what might come next. Alabama, according to the latest FAQ sheet available on the spending package, will receive the following over the next five years (without mentioning specific projects):

- \$5.2 billion for federal-aid highway programs and \$255 million for bridge replacements
- A minimum of \$100 million to upgrade broadband coverage
- \$400 million for public transportation
- \$23 million to protect against wildfires and \$19 million to protect against wildfires
- \$79 million to support the expansion of electric vehicle charging throughout the state.
- \$728 million to improve water infrastructure across the state
- \$140 million for infrastructure development at its airports.

Funding also exists for the state’s ports and rail networks. U.S. Rep. Terri Sewell, D-Birmingham, believes the package will go a long way in reducing the number of areas around the state where there are risks for blockages along railroad crossings.

The most recent analysis by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) gave Alabama a C- grade on its infrastructure report card. The ASCE estimates the condition of Alabama’s roads costing each driver \$434 per year, and 4% of the state’s bridges are rated as structurally deficient. Drinking water needs in Alabama are estimated at \$11.3 billion.

“Alabama’s infrastructure has been falling behind for far too long,” said Sewell.

‘Radical transformation’

But while the needs are high, specific projects funded under the IIJA have been slow to surface in the days after Congress adopted the bill.

Harris said that ALDOT will prioritize projects that are listed on its four-year State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), accelerating “completion of plans for projects before construction can begin.”

He added, “Also, we’re seeing a rise in construction costs, so that’s a planning factor for us moving forward. It’s too early to speculate how much will be available across various funding categories, or specifically how new funding might be prioritized.”

Some local officials in Alabama believe they have projects that are ready to move ahead with the right amount of federal investment.

In Huntsville city officials believe a couple of projects could be primed for the funding including the \$200 million project to improve safety and access at the I-565 interchange at Memorial Parkway.

In Mobile, the Airport Authority is anticipating a portion of the funding assisting in building new terminals. That could provide additional funds to support Mobile's goals to build a new terminal at the Mobile Aeroplex at Brookley as the city moves forward with shifting commercial aviation services to a location that is a few miles from the city's downtown area and nearby Airbus' largest North American manufacturing plant.

In Montgomery, city officials have a list of 15 projects that can be eligible for federal support once the money is available. Among the projects: Improvements to the city's bus shelters, an \$18.9 million expansion of U.S. 82 from Alabama State Route 14 to U.S. 31 in Prattville, and \$10.9 million to widen U.S. 231 (Wetumpka Highway) to six lanes from County Road 74 to Jasmine Hill Road.

Robert Smith, director of planning with the city of Montgomery, said \$143 million in federal funds are needed for roadway infrastructure capacity projects, and \$209 million in federal funds needed for maintenance and operational projects.

But without knowing the specifics about how the federal money will be programmed, he isn't sure what exactly will be prioritized by transportation officials.

"First things first, we would need to know what the rules are regarding the infrastructure funding," Smith said. "What can funds be spent on whether projects can be funded at 100% or if a 10% to 20% match will be required from local cities, counties, towns or ALDOT."

The program has some officials also wondering if the program will be able to put a dent in some of the state's largest and most high-profile projects, specifically the \$5.2 billion Birmingham Northern Beltline project and the Interstate 10 Mobile River and Bayway project that once was estimated to cost around \$2.1 billion.

The package did include \$175 million for Alabama over the next five years for the Northern Beltline, according to U.S. Rep. Gary Palmer's office. That amount is tied to an overall \$1.25 billion investment the infrastructure package includes for the ongoing build out of the long-stalled Appalachian Development Highway System.

The investment will be spread over 11 states, including Alabama, to continue work on the incomplete stretches of the approximately 3,100-mile network. The project was originally intended, years ago, to improve transportation and bolster economic activity in the mostly rural areas along the Appalachian mountain range.

U.S. Rep. Gary Palmer, R-Hoover, who voted against the package, recognized the project's inclusion as a "silver lining."

The I-10 project in Mobile, however, is not listed within the overall package. A spokesman with U.S. Rep. Jerry Carl's office said that earmarks were omitted from the final version, which prevented the bridge – viewed as a high-priority project for the state – to get included.

Kevin Harrison, director of transportation planning with the Mobile Metropolitan Planning Organization, said he is "hopeful there will be an opportunity for funding to help the I-10 bridge, but I have not seen it."

Instead, the package includes a large set aside to purchase electric vehicle charging stations. In addition to the estimated \$79 million the state is getting over five years for electric charging stations, Alabama will also be eligible for additional funding through \$2.5 billion in grants the federal government will dedicate toward electric vehicle charging.

Allen Parrish, executive director with the Alabama Transportation Institute and a professor at the University of Alabama, said the idea that there will be "radical transformation in road building projects will be tough" because the federal package includes non-traditional infrastructure investments.

He added, "You might say \$1 trillion will pay for anything. But I don't think it's big enough. The problem you run into with road building projects is that it's complicated, they are hard to do and take years (to complete) and are politically complex. To achieve transformative gains in that space, you have to pour on the money." Continue [HERE](#)

\$1B for Urban Highway Removals On the Way, More Money Could Follow

By Bill Lucia, Senior Editor

NOVEMBER 8, 2021

Advocates say \$4 billion in domestic spending legislation that could help revamp roads that split apart cities is a crucial addition to funding in the infrastructure bill Congress approved last week.

Removing highways carved through city neighborhoods during the heyday of American interstate building, in the 1950s and 1960s, is an idea that has gained traction in communities around the country in recent years, with some projects completed and others in the works.

The roughly \$1 trillion infrastructure bill Congress approved last week that is awaiting President Biden's signature will provide \$1 billion to help pay for these types of projects under what's known as the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program. That's not a small sum, but it's well short of the \$20 billion Biden initially proposed for an initiative like this.

"While significant, it is important to recognize just how small a step this is," the Congress for the New Urbanism said in a statement following the infrastructure bill's passage.

CNU and other advocates of erasing and retrofitting troubling segments of urban highways are now urging lawmakers to keep another pot of money in the separate, nearly \$2 trillion, domestic spending legislation Democrats are trying to push ahead with next.

The \$4 billion Neighborhood Access and Equity Grants Program in that bill would also provide funding states and local governments could tap to overhaul and tear down roads that are considered problematic. These grant funds would be available for other types of projects, too, like pedestrian friendly street infrastructure, multi-use trails, and improving access to transportation hubs and other destinations.

“I think we’ve come to a point where there’s a general consensus that highways have caused a lot of damage in the communities that they’ve been routed through,” said Ben Crowther, who works on Congress for the New Urbanism programs focused on removing and revamping highways that cut through city neighborhoods.

“What we’re doing in removing these highways is rebuilding cities. I think that’s the framework that we have to look at it through,” Crowther added. “It’s making an investment. This is not an investment in moving cars fast but an investment in neighborhoods.”

Many Potential Projects

When critics describe the problems highways have caused in urban communities, they often point to issues like air pollution from traffic, dangers for pedestrians, and disinvestment as residents and businesses empty out. On top of that, the roads were often built in poorer and minority areas, tearing community fabric and raising equity concerns that linger decades later.

Meanwhile, the road infrastructure is aging, often into the 60 to 70 year range, and in some cases has seen declining use as cities have changed or seen their populations shrink.

Rochester, New York is an example of a city that has moved to rework one of its highways.

The city’s Inner Loop East Transformation Project converted a two-thirds-mile segment of sunken expressway (Mayor Lovely Warren referred to it as a “moat”) to an at-grade street. Completed in 2017, the project cost about \$22 million, with about \$17 million covered by federal grant funds. The city estimates that it cleared the way for upwards of \$200 million in investment.

Rochester is exploring whether to undertake a similar project on the northern stretch of the expressway.

Crowther pointed out that the cost of the projects can vary widely depending on their scope. For instance, a proposal to overhaul a section of Interstate 81 in Syracuse, New York, including an elevated portion of roadway, is expected to cost close to \$2 billion.

CNU has a list of about 50 segments of highway potentially ripe for revamping in cities across the U.S. In some places, discussions about what to do with the roadways are just getting underway or have been simmering. In others, governments are moving ahead with projects.

Examples include an interchange on the Massachusetts Turnpike in the Allston neighborhood of Boston and Interstate 10 over North Claiborne Avenue in New Orleans.

Funding in the infrastructure bill for the Reconnecting Communities pilot includes \$250 million for planning grants and \$750 million for capital construction grants. The money is spread over the five years the legislation covers, from 2022 to 2026.

With the \$4 billion Neighborhood Access and Equity grants in the domestic spending bill, nearly \$1.6 billion is designated specifically for places classified as economically disadvantaged.

Crowther noted that the money available for feasibility studies in the pair of grant programs presents an opportunity for local governments to take a closer look at projects that would fit within the bounds of the initiatives but that may not be “shovel-ready.”

Studies like this offer a chance to examine not just whether drastically remaking a freeway is realistic from a traffic engineering perspective, but also potential economic, public health and economic benefits.

“This is something that all American cities have done,” he added, “build these big roads.”

Freight carriers oppose Amtrak’s access to tracks

Posted by Dale Liesch | Nov 10, 2021 (reprinted with permission from the LAGNIAPPE)

Freight carriers argue that allowing Amtrak access to CSX-owned track in Mobile immediately and without proper infrastructure improvements would lead to unmanageable shipping issues, according to new filings with the Surface Transportation Board.

In the new briefs filed Nov. 3, CSX and Norfolk Southern argue that a 2021 modeling study shows Amtrak’s request to begin service between Mobile and New Orleans would “impair unreasonably” freight operations along the entire Gulf Coast corridor.

“The introduction of Amtrak service without the necessary infrastructure investments will cause substantial and immediate harm to the freight transportation that [CSX] and [Norfolk Southern] rail customers rely upon,” the brief stated.

For the board to allow Amtrak to use the track despite freight companies being impaired by the action would go against the wishes of Congress, the companies argued.

Without the addition of passenger rail service, the modeling study indicates the current infrastructure is capable of handling increases in freight capacity over the next two decades and beyond. When Amtrak is added to the models for both 2019 and 2039, disruptions begin to become apparent, according to the filings from the freight companies.

“When passenger trains are added to the 2039 Base Case with no supporting infrastructure, however, the result is a systematic failure in [CSX’s] and [Norfolk Southern’s] ability to provide freight service,” the filing states. “In 2039, even accounting for already planned or anticipated infrastructure investment to accommodate freight, the model cannot find a dispatching solution to accommodate passenger trains with no new infrastructure unless it permits freight trains to block grade crossings for two and a half hours.”

The presence of passenger trains on freight routes in 2039, with no added infrastructure, would result in shipping delays of slightly more than 20 percent and reduce freight train speeds by almost 5 percent, the companies argue.

In the near term, CSX and Norfolk Southern argue, the impact on freight trains would be similar. If passenger trains were added in 2019, freight would've seen a 22 percent increase in delays.

In the filings, CSX and Norfolk Southern write they are not opposed to passenger rail on the tracks, but ask Amtrak to consider these issues before moving forward.

“Amtrak must account for the actual impact that its proposed operations would have on freight customers, including adding the infrastructure necessary to prevent unreasonable interference with freight operations and paying the costs of its service,” the filings read. “Congress struck a balance between the interest of Amtrak in securing rights to operate over existing freight lines and the rights of the freight customers who rely on and ultimately fund that freight network. That balance provides that Amtrak may have access to freight lines to offer new passenger service — so long as it pays the full costs of that access and so long as its access does not unreasonably interfere with freight service.”

Amtrak and freight rail existed together on the same stretch of track until 2005 when repairs related to Hurricane Katrina forced the passenger train to stop service. Amtrak has proposed bringing service back to the Port City in the form of daily trains to and from New Orleans.

The city has plans to build a passenger rail station and received grant funds to design a train stop, first at the Convention Center and now at the Brookley Aeroplex, which will be the home of a new international airport in 2024.

Dealing with “Double Taxation” Objections to Tolling

Robert Poole
Director of Transportation Policy The Reason Foundation

November 5, 2021

Highway user groups, especially in the trucking sector, have generally opposed any expansion of tolling in the United States. One reason for this is that just about all our legacy toll roads are being fully paid for by their toll revenues. But their customers also pay the usual federal and state fuel taxes, so they are actually paying twice to use the same highway. A second concern is that in some states—New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, in particular—legislatures have required toll agencies to divert significant fractions of their toll revenues to non-toll-road and often non-highway uses. This amounts to yet another tax, just on toll road customers, instead of those other projects being funded out of general taxes paid by all taxpayers.

Over many years of talking with and giving presentations to trucking groups and other highway user groups (e.g., AAA), I developed a set of customer-friendly tolling provisions, aimed initially at new instances of tolling, such as toll-financed reconstruction and modernization of aging Interstate highways. One of the most important of these provisions is to eliminate “double taxation,” by giving rebates of fuel taxes incurred by customers of the new tolled corridors.

In conversations with state transportation departments (DOTs), I've seen coolness, if not opposition, to this idea. State DOTs are becoming concerned about the projected decline of fuel tax revenues in coming decades (due to ever-tougher federal Corporate Average Fuel Economy, CAFE, standards regulations and the effort to replace petroleum-fueled vehicles with electric vehicles). They are not keen on giving up a portion of this shrinking fuel-tax pie. My response has always been, “But look at the benefits. If fuel-tax rebates remove a major obstacle to toll-financing your second-generation Interstates, won't you be better off than if you tried to use dwindling fuel tax revenue for this important infrastructure renewal?”

Like most of them, I was educated as an engineer, so I finally concluded that only a realistic quantitative demonstration could persuade them. Over the past year I have constructed a quantitative model of a hypothetical mid-sized state using toll financing—with fuel tax rebates—to rebuild and modernize its long-distance Interstates. It's been just posted online here.

This was a pretty complicated exercise. Since every state is different, the first task was to create a composite mid-size state, using federal highway data on 10 states in the middle of the population distribution. On average, they each had four long-distance Interstates, totaling 2,595 lane miles. I modeled this as four identical corridors, two of which needed only reconstruction and the other two also needing one additional lane in each direction.

The next step was estimating the cost of both reconstruction and lane additions. For the data needed to do this, I relied on the most recent unit cost data for both types of Interstate construction from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA's) Highway Economic Requirement System (HERS) database. The most recent figures, alas, are from 2016, which I updated to 2019 using FHWA's National Highway Construction Cost Index. Realistically speaking, a state would not oversee four multi-billion-dollar megaprojects all at once, so I spaced them out to begin construction (after environmental clearance) in 2025, 2028, 2031, and 2034. Assuming (another customer-friendly tolling principle) that toll collection started after each corridor was completed, the toll revenue would begin five years after the start of construction.

To verify that the toll rates would be enough to cover the construction costs plus the operating and maintenance (O&M) costs, I carried out a sketch-level traffic & revenue analysis. I used data from existing tolled Interstates to get average toll rates in today's dollars of 7 cents per mile for light vehicles and 28 cents per mile for heavy trucks. The average projected annual vehicle miles traveled (VMT) growth rate for the 10 mid-size states was 0.91% for light vehicles and 2.0% for heavy vehicles. But since we know that a tolled highway will attract less VMT than a non-tolled highway, I used estimated diversion rates (for cars and for heavy trucks) to get net (i.e., tolled) VMT in each year from 2030 to 2060 during which the tolling would start and continue. And to cover O&M costs, I assumed 15% of gross toll revenue would be reserved for that, with 85% for debt service on the toll revenue bonds. The good news is that the net present value (NPV) of net toll revenue was within a few percent of the NPV of construction costs, showing that the toll rates are in the right ballpark for these projects to be toll-feasible.

Still with me? The final step was to estimate the fuel tax rebates needed each year for the light-vehicle and heavy-vehicle customers on the rebuilt corridors. For this I received valuable assistance from Ed Regan, recently retired from CDM Smith, who has been working with me on several projects dealing with the transition from per-gallon fuel taxes to per-mile charges. We drew on data from the Energy Information Administration on projected vehicle fuel economy and also data from Bloomberg New Energy Finance on projected electric vehicle market penetration. Those projections extend only to 2050, so I extended them conservatively to 2060. The result was a plausible estimate of the amount the generic state would spend on fuel-tax rebates from 2030 through 2060.

Now here's the bottom line. The net present value of fuel tax rebates (\$505 million) over this period is a mere 6.8% of the NPV of gross toll revenue (\$7.45 billion) over the same period. To be sure, those \$505 million are real dollars. But look at what the state gets in exchange. Per the assumptions and numbers in the study, it would not have to use any of its limited fuel tax revenues to either (a) rebuild all its aging rural Interstates, or (b) to operate and maintain them. All its remaining state and federal fuel tax monies would be available for all the other highways that are the state DOT's responsibilities.

Note also that the way the study was done reflects all four of the customer-friendly state tolling principles:

1. Toll roads not used as cash cows: all toll revenue used for reconstruction plus O&M;
2. Reduced cost of toll collection: all-electronic tolling with incentives for prepaid transponder accounts;
3. Real value-added for customers: no tolls collected until a rebuilt corridor opens to traffic; and,
4. No double taxation: state fuel tax rebates.

There is no guarantee that a state's adoption of these four principles would remove all opposition to toll-financed Interstate modernization. But they would remove the primary arguments typically made by opponents. And that could be worth a great deal.

Transportation Research

State seeks feedback from Alabamians on broadband access

Posted on [September 21, 2021](#)

MONTGOMERY – Want to see further improvements in broadband access in Alabama? Here's is a simple way Alabamians can help. The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs is requesting information about broadband internet access and speed from Alabama residents and businesses.

Alabamians are encouraged to take the speed survey at <https://alabama.speedsurvey.org/> to help the state more precisely locate gaps in broadband service areas. The information gathered will be used for more specific mapping of service gaps and planning efforts to help fill those gaps.

"The COVID-19 pandemic shined a spotlight on the importance of having access to high-speed internet across the Alabama," ADECA Director Kenneth Boswell said. "Taking this speed survey will help us gather the data we need to map and plan our efforts to help close those service gaps."

ADECA administers the Broadband Alabama program, which includes the Broadband Accessibility Fund created by the Alabama Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Kay Ivey. Since 2018, the fund has assisted broadband providers with extending high-speed internet service for households, businesses and community anchors in unserved areas of the state or in areas lacking minimum threshold service.

Many Alabama homes and businesses receive less than the current federal definition of broadband service, which is 25 megabits per second (Mbps) download speed and three Mbps upload speed. The information gathered from the speed survey will help pinpoint the specific areas that lack this coverage. Your address will not be made public and the information will be used solely for the state's planning efforts.

"Broadband is a huge economic driver for recruiting industry and jobs," Boswell said. "This survey is quick and easy and helps show us precisely where the service gaps are, so we encourage all Alabama residents and businesses to take it and help us continue Gov. Kay Ivey's efforts to grow Alabama's economy."

A video explaining the survey is available on the [ADECA YouTube channel](#):