

U.S. Department of Transportation Transition Priority Issues for the National Association of Counties

The National Association of Counties is the only national organization representing county governments. There are 3068 urban, suburban and rural counties in the United States and over 2300 counties are members of NACo. Our members have broad areas of responsibility and provide an array of services. At the top of the list in most counties is transportation, including highways, transit, airport, ports and planning. America's counties own \$1.8 billion miles of roads, about 44 per cent of the total highway mileage in the nation, 256,000 bridges, about 45 per cent of the nation's bridges, one-third of the transit systems and one-third of the airports.

Intergovernmental Partnership

The intergovernmental partnership among the federal, state and local governments is a key component to the improvement of our nation's transportation system. While counties recognize the importance of federal participation in the financing of our highways, transit systems and airports, there needs to be recognition at the federal level that we are partners in the development of transportation infrastructure. County officials and NACo are much more than simply another stakeholder group in the discussion over legislation and policies relating to transportation. We are one of the major owners of the system.

Stimulus Package

NACo urges the new Administration to put forward a major stimulus package that includes substantial funding for transportation infrastructure. Not only must there be substantial funding, but the funds must be directed to those governments that own the highways, bridges, transit systems and airports and whose budgets are suffering due to the economic downturn. NACo is concerned that while the pending stimulus legislation does include funding for transit and airports that would go directly to local governments, the highway portion of the legislation provides no funding or allocation to local governments or metropolitan areas.

Surface Transportation Program

There is a crisis in surface transportation and it is time to challenge the traditional approach to the authorization of the federal surface transportation program. The federal program must be improved to solve the congestion and safety challenges of the 21st century and the financial integrity of the financing system must be addressed. Counties are a key part of the nation's integrated transportation system and must be part of the solution. A highway, bridge and transit program must be developed for the future that focuses on reliability, system preservation, innovative solutions and partnerships. An improved system of project delivery, flexibility and accountability will contribute to a better federal program. Issues under consideration for the 2009 reauthorization must include the adequacy of current funding in face of the substantial needs of the system; adequacy of the fuel tax as a future funding source; more funding for county-owned highways, bridges and transit systems; concerns about highway safety and the 43,000 fatalities each year on the system, a disproportionate number of which occur on two lane rural



roads; increasing congestion in the nation's metropolitan regions; and the need to streamline the regulatory system so that projects can be delivered more quickly and at a lower cost.

Airport/Aviation Program

Because of the substantial number of airports owned by counties and the importance of air service to the economic development strategies of counties, NACo has a broad interest in airport legislation. A major issue is the continuation and funding of the Airport Improvement Program (AIP), which provides grants to public airports for capital improvements. A related issue is the ability of airports to increase the Passenger Facility Charge (PFC) in order to raise more funds for airport development. The increased funding and reform of the Essential Air Service Program (EAS) and Small Community Air Service Development Program is very important. Historically, NACo has supported EAS and has been concerned about retaining and expanding air service to small and rural communities. Currently there are about 140 communities serviced by the EAS. It is likely in the current economic climate that more small airports will experience a downturn in air service that will require a more robust EAS program.

Streamlining

In many cases federal transportation funds coming to local governments are subject to substantial permitting and design requirements, which often result in delays to the completion of these projects and major added costs. There should be a simplified and integrated approach to environmental permitting related to the size and scope of the project, with a focus on saving time and dollars. For smaller and less costly projects, a "simple project" component must be developed that focuses on directly funding projects to local governments and has an outcome based accountability.

For further information, please contact:

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