



Policy 2016

Creating Safe, Sustainable, Multi-Modal Urban Transportation

The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) is a coalition of America's largest cities – hubs of economic activity, home to the majority of Americans, and site of the nation's greatest transportation challenges. These challenges range from the prosaic problem of maintaining roads, bridges and transit systems, to an increasing need to move growing city populations with safe, equitable, spatially efficient, environmentally sustainable transportation modes, to public demands for visionary leadership on city transportation. The national transportation system forms the basis for our metropolitan economies, and we look to Congress and the Administration to work with cities in formulating a legislative and regulatory environment that truly supports growth and prosperity for all Americans.

This policy document outlines the key priorities for city transportation in federal legislation and regulation.

Principle 1: Promote Safe Transportation Systems

Policies at the national level should prioritize safety for all modes, encourage urban street designs that are safe for people walking and bicycling, and promote an approach to urban transportation that aims to eliminate fatalities and serious injuries on streets and highways.

Action: Adopt requirements for side guard protections on trucks

NACTO commends the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) for advancing rules that will require rear impact guards and other safety features in single-unit trucks and tractor trailers. NACTO calls on NHTSA to adopt requirements for side impact guards and enhanced mirrors, in addition to rear impact guards and other safety strategies, on single unit trucks. Truck side guards are vehicle-based safety devices designed to keep pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorcyclists from being run over by a large truck's rear wheels in a side-impact collision. Requiring side impact guards is consistent with National Transportation Safety Board recommendations to NHTSA and improves safety for all users of the transportation system, particularly those who are walking and bicycling.

Action: Permit the use of federal funding for automated traffic enforcement

Automated traffic enforcement, including cameras to enforce speed limits and red lights, is a crucial tool in preventing crashes that result in serious injuries and fatalities. The FAST Act prohibits states from using Federal Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funds to “purchase, operate, or maintain an automated traffic enforcement system” except in a school zone. NACTO urges the federal government to permit the use of HSIP funds for automated traffic enforcement.

Action: Increase legal protection for vulnerable roadway users

At least eight states and a number of cities have passed Vulnerable Road User laws that provide general deterrence for dangerous driving behavior and provide legal protection to people who are injured or killed while walking or using a bicycle, wheelchair, or other non-motorized transportation. Without such laws, there are often no criminal charges or legal consequences for people operating motor vehicles who injure or kill vulnerable roadway users. NACTO urges the passage of Vulnerable Roadway User laws at every level around the country and nationally.

Action: Fully support safety programs for people walking, bicycling and other vulnerable road users

Walking and bicycling are inherently vulnerable modes of transportation that are also supported by the majority of Americans.¹ The 2015 FAST Act authorized a set-aside program to support specific projects that enhance walking and cycling through a portion of the Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) program. NACTO commends Congress for supporting these activities, and asks that USDOT work with States and Cities to fully support projects under this program.

Action: Prioritize safety in performance metrics and Highway Safety Improvement Program funding

Bicycle and pedestrian injuries and fatalities in the United States remain unacceptably high: in 2013, 4,735 pedestrians and 743 bicyclists were killed in traffic, and three out of four pedestrian deaths occurred in urban areas.² NACTO urges the federal government to endorse a Vision Zero policy with a goal to eliminate fatalities and serious injuries on streets, roads, and highways. To that end, NACTO calls on the federal government to prioritize performance measures that address bicycle and pedestrian safety, and to prioritize and increase funding within existing safety programs for safety improvements such as traffic calming, crosswalks, complete street retrofits, and safety cameras to improve enforcement of speeding, reckless driving, and failure to yield. NACTO commends USDOT for advancing safety through the Mayor’s Challenge for Safer People, Safer Streets.

¹ Princeton survey conducted for America Bikes in 2012 showed 83% supported maintaining or increasing funding for bicycling and walking. <http://www.americabikes.org/2012survey>

² National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Fatality Analysis Reporting System, 2013.

Principle 2. Renew America's roads, bridges, transit and freight systems to support our competitive edge

The nation's cities and their metropolitan areas account for 90 percent of the nation's gross domestic product and wages, and our roads, bridges, transit and freight systems are the foundation of that dynamic economy. Yet our investments are vastly outpaced by those in competing countries - in less than a decade, the U.S. has fallen from 7th to 18th in overall quality of our roads.³ Our ability to compete as a nation in the global economy depends on investment in our urban transportation systems.

Action: Take care of the basics

NACTO calls for increased federal transportation funding to meet the nation's infrastructure needs. In order to maintain the Highway Trust Fund's solvency, Congress must identify a reliable source of dedicated revenue that meets near-term transportation needs. The U.S. has a significant backlog of basic maintenance and replacement on all parts of the transportation system. One in four bridges in the U.S. requires significant repair or cannot accommodate today's traffic and two third of major roads are rated in less than good condition.⁴ FHWA estimates that an investment of \$170 billion annually is needed to improve the nation's highways, and \$20.5 billion annually is needed to eliminate the nation's bridge deficiency backlog by 2028.⁵ NACTO urges the federal government to support a significantly expanded and well-funded mode-neutral State of Good Repair program that targets resources where they are needed most, before structural failures require costly and disruptive shut-downs. Although NACTO supports innovative financing measures, these cannot be understood to replace the need for grants and revenue to repay loans and bonds.

Action: Invest in public transit to meet the nation's future mobility needs

Transit is the lifeblood of city transportation, providing spatially-efficient mobility and freeing up streets for biking and walking, public space, freight delivery, emergency vehicles, and other critical transportation needs. Among Americans who do have access to transit, ridership has increased by 9.1% in the past decade, yet 45% of American households still lack access to transit.⁶ Underfunded for many years, the transit systems serving U.S. cities need an increased level of support at the federal level - for bus, rail, and ferry transit projects. Transit investments are not an alternative to highway investments; both are needed to get people to work and school in cities across the country. In metropolitan areas, many expressways cannot be widened without negative impacts on businesses and residents, and transit investments can improve mobility. NACTO urges the federal government to increase federal funding for public transit to fully serve all Americans, and to maintain the stability of future funding through maintaining the Mass Transit Account within the Highway Trust Fund.

³ The National Economic Council and the President's Council of Economic Advisors, "An Economic Analysis of Transportation Infrastructure Investment," July 2014.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ American Society of Civil Engineers Report Card, 2013.

⁶ American Society of Civil Engineers Report Card, 2013

Action: Institute cost-benefit evaluation for new projects

The current evaluation and award requirements for new road projects and new transit projects funded by federal taxpayer dollars are dramatically unequal. This results in poor prioritization decisions at the local and state levels, as some dollars are “greener” than others. In particular, the FHWA evaluation for new road projects currently does not require rigorous cost-benefit analysis that also accounts for lifecycle costs and the opportunity costs represented by deferred maintenance on other parts of the system. The FTA evaluation criteria for new transit projects is considerably more rigorous, and should be further refined to weigh all benefits comparably, including economic development, energy savings, increased mobility and access, and congestion relief. Projects should generally be required to coordinate transportation and land use planning using transit-oriented development strategies to increase affordable housing investment near transit and employment centers.

Action: Fund a national multimodal freight research program

NACTO calls on the federal government to fully fund a national multimodal freight research program to study urban freight solutions. USDOT should lead a planning and research effort for a national freight system that supports economic development while also addressing and mitigating negative impacts of freight movement on neighborhoods and local communities, such as local air pollution and safety risks of trains and heavy truck traffic. Metropolitan areas and key ports should be a focus for the national freight system, as they represent some of the most complex and important links.

Principle 3: Bring project decisions closer to the taxpayer, at the local level

Transportation projects should be selected based on local priorities, not faceless processes at the State and Federal level. Federal policies can promote this by giving cities the authority and flexibility to select and build the transportation projects that address their particular challenges. NACTO calls for the alignment of responsibility, experience, and funding at the city level to encourage better urban street design and more efficient use of taxpayer dollars. State departments of transportation should support city initiatives to implement projects within the NACTO *Urban Street Design Guide*, and cities should have the flexibility to use federal funds in accordance with local objectives.

Action: Make direct aid agreements available for road and bridge projects in large cities

A direct-aid relationship between the Federal Highway Administration and large cities is currently unavailable for interested cities. Such a relationship would dramatically reduce red tape and speed project delivery for programs such as STP, CMAQ, and the Highway Safety Improvement Program. One of the most difficult issues facing the modernization of urban roads and bridges is the mismatch between the places with problems and the agencies with funds to address them. NACTO member agencies have the same or greater staff capacities and technical expertise as many state departments of transportation, yet are subject to arduous pass-through rules and regulations. These processes generally add little or no value to city projects, but invariably add months or years to project delivery.

Action: Support Federal commitments to metropolitan areas

Metropolitan areas rely on Federal roadway funding for critical needs such as road and bridge repair. NACTO asks that USDOT work closely with the States to ensure that funding is allocated within States to both follow the law and meet performance targets for metropolitan transportation systems.

Action: Cut project delivery time

Project reviews by multiple agencies create exponential delays in project delivery, often without changing the underlying project in any significant or positive way. State and Federal review processes should be evaluated and made concurrent, revised, or eliminated where they are redundant and unnecessary.

Action: Make metropolitan planning performance based

Project selection under the metropolitan planning process should be performance based, incentivizing projects that provide congestion relief, access to transit, energy conservation and efficiency, improved air quality, and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.

Action: Incentivize integration of transportation and land use

In most states, local government is the seat of land use control, and increased coordination between land use and transportation planning benefits the local community. The federal government should promote this coordination through planning and funding policies. Transportation projects that support smart growth land use decisions such as complete streets initiatives, form-based codes and rigorous station area planning should be prioritized in the processes required for metropolitan planning.

Principle 4: Promote Energy Efficient and Environmentally Sustainable Transportation Systems

Policies at the national level should promote energy and cost efficiency in transportation through increased investments in bus, rail, and ferry public transit use, ride-sharing, bike-sharing, bicycling, walking and efficient goods movement. These modes provide savings to both the government in the long-term of life cycle costs and cost savings to the consumer in the short term.

Action: Prepare for Self-Driving Vehicle Technology in Multimodal, Urban Contexts

Fully self-driving vehicles are an emerging technology that will have widespread impacts on safety, mobility, land use, and the built environment. This technology presents the opportunity to reduce collisions, optimize fleets, improve mobility, and close the divide between those who have access and mobility and those who don't. The technology also presents risks of increasing vehicle miles traveled, promoting longer car trips and urban sprawl, and further entrenching automobile-oriented design. Thoughtful city and federal policy should promote the use of self-driving vehicles as part of the sharing economy in a safe, multi-modal, urban transportation

system. Federal research on self-driving vehicle technology should consider multimodal urban contexts, including interactions between self-driving vehicles and people walking and bicycling.

Action: Include greenhouse gas emissions as a transportation performance measure

Performance measures being promulgated by USDOT for State highway departments and for metropolitan planning organizations should include reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Action: Provide equity for transit commuters and parking benefits in the tax system

NACTO commends Congress for permanently equalizing pretax benefits for driving and transit use. NACTO also urges the federal government to recognize bicycle sharing as a form of mass transit and include bicycle sharing membership costs as eligible expenses under qualified transit benefits.

Action: Connect America's cities with world-class high-speed intercity passenger rail

A federal commitment to improving rail infrastructure is critical to encouraging a growing market for medium-distance travel in the U.S., while alleviating traffic at hub airports. NACTO urges the federal government to place high-speed intercity passenger rail on equal footing with other surface transportation programs by providing dedicated federal funding for intercity passenger rail.

Principle 5: Expand Financing Options for Transportation Projects

Current federal transportation funding is dominated by grant programs that are eligible for a certain set of project types and, in the case of highway funds, administered by the states. Two other forms of funding provide a more complete suite of funding mechanisms for the federal program: tolling, financing assistance and competitive grants.

Action: Fully fund the competitive TIGER program

Congress and the Administration should expand and make permanent the TIGER program to begin to meet the levels of interest in projects around the country. TIGER, also known as National Infrastructure Investments, has been vastly oversubscribed since its inception in 2009. By any measure, many high-quality projects have gone unfunded because the funding level has not increased since 2010. Through its highly competitive merit-based application process, TIGER funds innovative, multimodal, and highly beneficial projects in communities around the U.S., creating jobs and improving transportation networks. In seven rounds since 2009, the TIGER program has provided nearly \$4.6 billion to 381 projects in all 50 states, funding projects to improve and repair critical roads and bridges, relieve freight choke points, connect people with opportunities through public transit, and create safe infrastructure for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Action: Expand eligibility for tolling on existing roadways

The reduction in funding available through traditional user fees such as gas taxes and user fees has drained the coffers of public agencies working to maintain existing roadways and bridges. NACTO calls on Congress to give localities the tools to raise funds for critical maintenance and replacement projects through tolling of existing facilities.

Action: Expand and reform existing financing support programs (e.g., TIFIA and the Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing Program, RRIF)

NACTO urges the federal government to encourage more private sector investment in transportation through vehicles such as a national infrastructure bank and Build America Bonds, to complement the federal government's commitment to public investment in infrastructure. The Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) program has been instrumental in bringing many visionary projects to fruition around the U.S., and should be expanded.