

MODERNIZE THE PROGRAM

Bring the federal program into the 21st century



United States transportation policy relies on transportation [planning concepts and research](#) developed more than half a century ago. Americans today spend more money to drive more miles to access fewer opportunities than ever before. This is largely due to our reliance on documents that direct planners to prioritize the movement of vehicles without considering all modes (like walking, biking, and taking transit), land use, and the full cost of transportation to end users, which influences travel choices and environmental and economic outcomes.

Policies to improve the state of the system

- 1. Remove outdated performance measures from practice.** Key metrics used for major transportation planning decisions rely on models and assumptions developed in the 1960s that have been shown, time and time again, to be unfit for use in developing and selecting most projects.
 - Direct the Secretary of the Department of Transportation to repeal the “[value of time](#)” and similar outmoded guidance from federal documents that focus excessively on moving people faster at the expense of safety and access to jobs and useful destinations.
 - Evaluate and make public the accuracy of travel demand models utilized in the development of federal transportation projects, particularly [four-step models](#), and set standards to improve that accuracy.
 - Where project sponsors can demonstrate through modeling that transportation challenges are better addressed through development than a transportation investment, the sponsor should be allowed to use transportation dollars to support that development.
- 2. Add multimodal access to jobs and essential services to the performance measures required under the National Highway Performance Program.** The U.S. has had the technology for decades to measure how many jobs and essential services (like grocery stores, schools, banks, and medical care) people can access by all modes of transportation. Today, measures like congestion reduction and travel time savings only capture speed improvements—as opposed to time savings—and are a proxy for this outcome. It’s time to replace the proxy measures with new tools that track how all transportation options allow folks to access essential destinations. USDOT should develop the data measures to share with states and MPOs.

3. **Require that states and MPOs use tools to evaluate the long-term impact of programmatic investments.** State transportation improvement programs provide a snapshot of investment priorities, but the actual benefits and outcomes that those projects build toward are often not incorporated into decision making, even when they work against goals in long range transportation plans (LRTPs).
 - USDOT should help states adopt tools, like the Georgetown Climate Center's Transportation Investment Strategy Tool, that evaluate the impact of programmatic investment decisions. Investment modeling should anticipate the impact of projects on the system's state of good repair, road safety, public health, economy, and emissions.
4. **Develop a new framework for permitting and environmental review that advances a faster, outcomes-based approach to approvals.** The current approach to reducing environmental and community harm involves studying a project to determine its impacts and negotiating environmental mitigation efforts, but it does nothing to prevent the actual negative outcomes. And after decades of running projects through these processes, it is the more common projects that are able to move through it effectively, while newer, more innovative, and often more environmentally friendly projects get hung up. We should move from the current paradigm of review and process to one of standards and outcomes. Federal funds should go to projects that have predictable positive environmental and community outcomes based on scientifically proven predictive models and approaches. Projects that do not meet minimum standards should only get federal support if they fully mitigate all impacts and then receive a lower proportion of federal support.

For questions or more information, please contact our policy team at info@smartgrowthamerica.org



Transportation for America is a national non-profit working to create a transportation system that safely, affordably, and accessibly connects everyone to jobs, services, and opportunities through diverse travel options.

See our full reauthorization platform at t4america.org/reauthorization