



Western Governors' Association Policy Resolution 08-7

Transportation in the West: Ensuring Mobility, Connectivity, Accessibility, and Reliability

A. BACKGROUND

1. The American West encompasses a huge land mass representing 2.4 million square miles or over two-thirds of the entire country. Over 104 million people live in these states and they reside in large, densely populated cities, smaller cities and towns and in rural areas.
2. High quality highways, bridges, and transit that ensure mobility, connectivity, accessibility and reliability, are essential to the quality of life, economic development, energy independence and environmental protection of rural and urban areas of the western states.
3. Timely implementation of transportation projects in rural and urban areas to address congestion, safety, mobility, connectivity, accessibility, reliability, and system preservation and deterioration is critical to successfully addressing our transportation challenges. Increased federal funding along with project streamlining would be efficient and effective components of needed transportation program enhancements.
4. Transportation projects across the nation continue to be delayed due to repetitive and inefficient federal processes. According to information compiled by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), major highway projects with federal investment take approximately thirteen years from inception to completion. Delays for permit approvals also spring from requirements outside the U.S. Department of Transportation, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Land Management. The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission reported that the environmental review process includes multiple redundancies that delay project delivery by an average of four years. These redundancies include duplicate environmental analyses and reviews that contribute little to environmental quality while increasing project costs by up to 40 percent and increase project delays.
5. Project development delays have a direct effect on the cost of projects and increased material costs and inflation only exacerbate project delays. A national commission recently reported that between 2004 and 2006, the cost of highway projects increased by 43 percent while inflation (as measured by the CPI) rose by only 7 percent. Since 2006, states have continued to report significant increases in bid costs and material costs far exceeding the increases in the CPI.
6. High quality highways, bridges and transit are critical to support the quality of life for people in the West because they
 - make the basics of life, such as food, shelter and health care, more available and affordable,
 - make point to point travel faster and reduce congestion, thereby giving people more time to spend with family and other non-work activities , and
 - give people access to recreational and entertainment opportunities.

7. High quality highways, bridges and transit are critical for the economic growth of the West because they
 - are often the crucial first and last connectors for the truck transportation of food, raw materials, people and products being transported in part by other modes of transportation, such as air, sea and rail,
 - increase the number of places where new job creation can occur, and
 - are a component in determining the ultimate price that people pay for all products and services.
8. High quality highways and bridges are also critical so that the people of the American West and the North American continent can become energy independent from the rest of the world because they
 - enable people to be more energy efficient by reducing congestion and providing the roadway system for the use of energy efficient and congestion reducing transit,
 - are connectors between energy raw materials and energy production facilities for both electricity and fuels, and
 - serve as primary paths for the distribution of alternative transportation fuels to communities of every size.
9. High quality surface transportation systems are critical to the future of the West because
 - the populations of the 19 western states are projected to increase by 45 percent between 2000 and 2030, while the populations of the other states are projected to increase by only 21 percent,
 - they are the transportation connections used by people to travel within the West and to the rest of the United States and North America, and
 - the people of the Nation and the West depend on high quality highways, bridges and transit in the West every day.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

Immediate Crisis

1. The Governors reaffirm the Western Governor's Association Policy Resolution 08-01 which requests that the Federal government respond to the immediate threat of Highway Trust fund insolvency by passing legislation in 2008 to ensure that the Highway Trust fund can support funding of highway and transit programs for FY 2009 at the levels called for in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act passed by Congress and signed by the President in 2005.

Funding for the Reauthorization

2. The Governors believe that a strong Federal role in transportation capital funding should be continued at the historic 45 percent level or higher, even with increased funding by states, state-private partnerships and local governments.
3. The Governors believe there needs to be a significant increase in the Federal investment in surface transportation because it is the critical component needed for quality of life, economic growth, energy independence and a better future for the people of the Nation and the West.

4. The Governors believe in continued funding eligibility for all existing Federal-aid eligible routes and the retention of the Federal Lands Program.
5. The Governors believe in creating more stable and sustainable funding sources for transportation using a variety of mechanisms, such as the “Build America Bonds” legislation introduced by Senators Wyden, Thune and others.

Other Priorities for the Reauthorization

6. The Governors strongly believe that a high priority must be placed on repairing and maintaining our current system of highways, bridges and transit. New transportation initiatives should be done in addition to, and not in place of, fixing and maintaining our core systems. Funding sufficient to preserve current systems must be pursued, along with funding needed for improvements.
7. The Governors believe in creating financing mechanisms and tools that are appropriate for all areas of the United States, including those with low traffic densities where tolling and public private partnerships are not feasible.
8. The Governors believe in simplifying program structure, reducing the number of set-aside and allocation programs outside of the basic core programs, increasing current flexibility, and eliminating or reducing earmarks. The Federal program should be improved by reducing regulation, reducing Federal oversight beyond what is needed for efficiency and accountability, and by increasing flexibility so each state can better address its unique needs and the needs of the Nation.
9. The Governors believe in streamlining and simplifying regulatory and environmental requirements to quickly deliver transportation projects while still addressing environmental concerns.
10. The Governors believe in preserving at least the current Federal matching ratios adjusted for Federal lands.
11. The Governors believe in maintaining budgetary firewalls that guarantee trust fund monies are used for transportation purposes.

Streamlining Program and Project Delivery Processes

12. The Governors urge Congress and the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) to simplify the NEPA process while protecting the environment for projects with few significant impacts, including allowing the NEPA process to move forward as well as granting FHWA the ability to issue final decisions without the entire project being fiscally constrained in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). This will allow states to move forward with phased construction without the extra approval steps currently required.
13. The Governors urge Congress and the Executive Branch to revise Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations to narrow the number of required “reasonable alternatives,” at least for transportation projects, while ensuring they reflect both community values and funding realities.
14. The Governors urge the FHWA to set minimum requirements for the “robust scoping” period before publishing the Notice of Intent and formally beginning NEPA.

15. The Governors urge Congress and the USDOT to allow advance construction approaches (also known as “at risk design” or “design-build”) and protective right of way acquisition under federal regulations. This will let project sponsors proceed with design activities at their own risk during the EIS process, minimize relocation impacts and environmental effects, and also reduce project costs.
16. The Governors urge Congress and the USDOT to require greater coordination among federal agencies reviewing transportation project permits by setting time limits for review, using federal transportation funds to pay for regulatory staff to comply with time limits and establishing a cabinet-level appeal process where USDOT can seek redress for adverse decisions.
17. The Governors urge Congress and the USDOT to increase spending on innovative, cost effective alternatives that include reversible lane strategies and signal timing schemes.

The Federal and State Roles for the Reauthorization

18. The Governors believe that an increased proportion of highway funds should go to the core programs of Interstate Maintenance, National Highway System, Surface Transportation Program, Bridge, Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality, and Safety and to the national Federal Lands Program. States should retain the flexibility to transfer core program funding among these programs and other modes based upon state planning and performance processes. The Governors also urge simplification of the transit program where applicable.
19. The Governors believe in maintaining the primary role of states in planning, program delivery, and system ownership, relying on states to develop and implement performance measures and outcome based management and reducing top down “one size fits all” Federal control.
20. The Governors believe there is a strong Federal responsibility to invest in surface transportation and abandoning that responsibility would not serve the best interests of the Nation or the states.

C. GOVERNORS’ MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. The Western Governor’s Association (WGA) shall post this resolution on its Web site to be referred to and transmitted as necessary.
2. WGA staff is directed to develop active partnership relationships with other regional and national organizations to further WGA policy initiatives in transportation to ensure transportation mobility, connectivity, accessibility, and reliability in the region.
3. WGA staff shall work in partnership with the Western Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (WASHTO) to provide the Governors with additional information on the transportation system in the West and best practices for managing them. Issues for possible joint action include a regional study to identify the current and anticipated impacts of freight travel within the western interstate system; a workshop on transportation planning for freight; a workshop on transportation project streamlining; and/or any other action that is needed to further the Governor's policies in this resolution.