



AMERICA'S TOWNS & TOWNSHIPS NEED FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION SUPPORT FOR SAFETY & ACCESSIBILITY

As Congress prepares to authorize new federal transportation legislation, NATaT and America's towns and townships support increased federal resources to address the transportation needs of rural and small urban areas including:

- **Funding of \$10 billion for rural and small community road safety programs including sign reflectivity requirements; and**
- **Annual grant support of \$250 million, and inclusion of small and rural communities in federal programs, for sustainable and clean transportation infrastructure.**

TRANSPORTATION & TOWNS ACROSS AMERICA

Towns and townships across America need enhanced federal resources to support rural connectivity and roadway safety. The Interstate Highway System initially grew out of a plan to connect cities of 50,000 or more. Today, small urban and rural America is home to 90 million people with nearly three-fourths of the public roadways in the United States. With low population density and lower traffic volumes, it is difficult to generate the revenues necessary to pay for transportation infrastructure improvements. As a result, roadway conditions and public transportation services in these areas are neglected. Roads and public transportation services are critical to the sustainable economic development and quality of life in the nation's smaller communities, providing vital links to educational and employment opportunities, and access to important social services.

As mandated by Congress, the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission reviewed the nation's transportation system and provided recommendations for the next transportation reauthorization. In its January 2008 report, the Commission highlighted the national interest in connecting major metropolitan areas to rural and small urban areas. The Commission recommends taking rural areas into account when updating the national transportation system, and also asserts that public transportation is vital in rural and small urban areas. Likewise, the House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure's hearing and report on "Connecting Communities: The Role of the Surface Transportation Network in Moving People and Freight" finds that our nation's smaller communities and regions face unique challenges that must be addressed if the nation's interconnected surface transportation network is to continue to be the backbone of our economic development, global competitiveness, and overall quality of life.

TOWNS NEED FEDERAL SUPPORT FOR ROAD SAFETY

Small and rural communities face serious challenges in the funding and implementation of road safety projects including sign reflectivity upgrades, construction and operational improvements on high risk rural roads, pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements, traffic calming, removal of roadside barriers and hazards, installation of guardrails and other safety devices, and other safety improvements.

According to the Center for Transportation Studies at the University of Minnesota, "safety professionals and policymakers are especially concerned with rural roads, which annually claim more lives than urban roads."

For more information contact NATaT's Federal Affairs Director
Jennifer Imo at (202) 454-3954 or jimo@tfgnet.com

Rural Transportation Safety and the Strategic Highway Safety Plan (February 2008), p. 1. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, one-fifth of America's population resides in rural areas, yet three-fifths or more of all traffic fatalities and serious injuries occur in rural areas. NHTSA Report, Traffic Crashes Take Their Toll on America's Rural Roads," p. 1.

In the SAFETEA-LU surface transportation legislation, Congress directed State highway departments to develop strategic highway safety plans to reduce roadway fatalities and serious injuries. See SAFETEA-LU Title I, Subtitle D, 23 U.S.C. Section 148. These strategic safety plans must include recommendations for improving safety on high risk rural roads, for signage improvements, and for other critical needs in small town communities. SAFETEA-LU recognized the acute problem in rural and small communities and directed specific funding toward construction and operational improvements on high risk rural roads. Section 148(f)(1). ***In the reauthorization of SAFETEA-LU, NATaT requests that this provision require that no less than 75 percent of such rural road funding be passed through to eligible localities, and not directed only to State-owned rural roads.***

A major challenge for rural communities is compliance with FHWA requirements established in the Manual for Uniform Control Devices, which mandate that all road signs be replaced with new signs meeting minimum reflectivity standards, beginning in 2009 and continuing through the compliance deadline of 2014. For instance, the Minnesota Department of Transportation estimates that the cost to small and rural towns in that state alone will cost between \$58-\$74 million. These requirements are an important but costly unfunded mandate on towns and townships that should be funded through the SAFETEA-LU Section 148(f)(1) safety program.

To support construction and operational improvements on high risk rural roads, including mandated sign reflectivity upgrades, NATaT calls on Congress to increase funding in the high risk rural road program established under SAFETEA-LU Section 148(f)(1), by providing \$10 billion over the 5-year statutory period, including \$1 billion dedicated to funding support for small and rural communities to implement sign reflectivity upgrades.

TOWNS NEED FEDERAL SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINABLE AND CLEAN TRANSPORTATION

Towns and townships seek to save energy, save money, and reduce vehicle emissions through the implementation of cleaner transportation choices in their communities. Town efforts include the development and operation of bus transit; the construction of bikeways, greenways and walkability infrastructure; and the development of alternative fuel and plug-in hybrid infrastructure and vehicles.

However, all of these approaches are innovative and costly, and cannot be deployed without federal support and partnership. As Congress considers how to address energy independence, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and improved local quality of life through clean transportation investments, NATaT urges Congress to support the sustainability efforts of small towns and rural communities, not just large metropolitan cities.

Federal funding for the establishment and operation of bus transit, pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and alternative fueled vehicles should include a 20 percent set-aside for small and rural localities. In addition, Congress should establish a \$250 million annual "Sustainable Rural Transportation Demonstration Program" to provide competitive FHWA grants to localities of less than 25,000 for the planning and implementation of these sustainable transportation programs and projects.

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