#

# Transportation Reauthorization Priorities

## Ensure Federal Transportation Funds Flow to Towns and Townships

### NATaT Supports Direct, Guaranteed Funding to Local Roads and Bridges

Towns and townships in many NATaT-member states manage more miles of road than any other government entity in their states. Federal funds flow directly to state departments of transportation and to metropolitan planning organizations but rarely make their way to the towns and townships that are responsible for maintaining the roads. NATaT supports a solution in transportation reauthorization that guarantees direct and consistent funding for locally owned roads and bridges.

### NATaT Supports a Realistic Definition of “Rural”

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law created opportunities for local governments to secure federal assistance to shore up failing infrastructure, including programs that were supposed to target rural communities. Unfortunately, many of them – transportation and otherwise – include unrealistic and different definitions of “rural.” For example, the Federal Highway Administration’s Rural Surface Transportation Grant Program and the Better Utilizing Investment to Leverage Development (BUILD) Grant Program define rural as “located outside a Census-designated urban area that had a population greater than 200,000 In the 2020 Census.” The Federal Transit Administration’s Bus and Bus Facilities Grant program and the Federal Railroad Administration’s Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant program define rural as “any area that has not been designated in the 2020 Census as an “urban area” with at least 50,000 in population by the Secretary of Commerce.” The majority of towns and townships in this country have a population of 5,000 or less. If the federal government wants to ensure needed funds are getting to all areas of the country – urban and rural and anywhere in between – a more realistic definition of rural is necessary.

**If the Rural Surface Transportation Grant Program is authorized in transportation reauthorization, NATaT supports the Protecting Infrastructure Investments for Rural America Act (H.R. 502) that reduces the definition of “rural area” in the Rural Surface Transportation Grant Program from 200,000 to 30,000**. This population number is in alignment with definitions used by the Small Business Administration and U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development. In addition to reducing the population threshold, H.R. 502 would:

* Clarify that the goal of the Rural Grant program is to promote economic development in rural areas, as well as improve the quality of life for citizens who live in them.
* Allow the grant to be used for common road, bridge, highway, or tunnel projects, expanding the eligibility for more projects in rural areas.
* Strike the minimum project amount of $25M, considering that most projects in rural areas are under this amount.
* Lower the cost-share burden for communities with populations less than 5,000, increasing the likelihood projects in these communities can be completed in a timely manner.
* Establish a set-aside of at least five percent of funding under the program to go to communities of less than 5,000 in population, ensuring these communities receive federal assistance for their infrastructure needs.

Authorizing this program will provide a continued and needed resource for smaller communities, and H.R. 502 would ensure a level playing field for rural America to access competitive grant funds by making sure the eligibility requirements accurately represent rural communities.

### NATaT Supports Increasing Access to the Federal Off-System Bridge Program

NATaT supports the U.S. Department of Transportation’s (USDOT’s) Off-System Bridge program, which funds state and local bridges that are not on the Federal-aid Highway system. However, many of the nation’s “bridges” that need repair and replacement are not eligible because they do not meet the federal definition of a bridge. Federal regulations define a bridge as a structure having a span greater than 20 feet (23 CFR 661.17(a)(1)). Unlike structures greater than 20 feet, smaller bridges are largely not inventoried, not inspected for safety or condition, and are not eligible for federal funding. NATaT supports increased funds for the federal bridge program that are provided to states for non-state structures less than 20 feet, which states must distribute through a competitive process based on condition and economic need.

### NATaT Supports Authorization of the Safe Streets and Roads for All Grant Program

The Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) grant program was created and funded through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. NATaT supports authorization for this program in transportation reauthorization. The purpose of SS4A is to improve roadway safety by significantly reducing or eliminating roadway fatalities and serious injuries through safety action plan development and implementation focused on all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation users, motorists, personal conveyance and micromobility users, and commercial vehicle operators. The program provides funding to develop the tools to help strengthen a community’s approach to roadway safety and save lives and is designed to meet the needs of local, Tribal, and regional communities that differ dramatically in size, location, and experience administering federal funding.

Funding through SS4A can be used to develop, complete, or supplement a comprehensive safety action plan, as well as carry out demonstration activities that inform an Action Plan. SS4A will also fund projects and strategies identified in an Action Plan that address roadway safety problems. According to USDOT, since launching in 2022, SS4A has funded projects to plan and implement roadway improvements that are proven to dramatically reduce crashes. More than 1,600 communities, of which almost half are in rural areas, have applied for and been awarded SS4A grants. Across the nation, SS4A supports roadway safety for around 75% of the U.S. population.

### NATaT Supports the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program

NATaT supports the continued authorization of the CRISI program, which was authorized in Section 11301 of the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, Pub. L. 114-94 (2015); 49 U.S.C. § 22907. This program funds eligible rail safety and service improvements, such as rail crossing improvements, upgrading track, and replacing or rehabilitating aging bridges. NATaT is also highly supportive of maintaining the 25 percent rural area set-aside to ensure smaller communities have a fair shot at accessing these funds. The CRISI program defines rural area as “any area that is not within an area designated as an urban area with at least 50,000 in population by the most recent decennial Census.”

## Keep Heavier, Larger Trucks Off Our Roadways

### NATaT Opposes Efforts to Allow Bigger Trucks on Our Roadways

The current weight limit for trucks operating on the federal highway system is 80,000 pounds. Legislation was introduced in the 118th Congress to create a nationwide “pilot” program to increase the national truck weight limit to 91,000 pounds or higher. The measure would also create an unlimited weight limit for battery-powered trucks. There was also a proposal to allow any governor to unilaterally raise interstate weights for emergencies and “other unusual conditions” leading to a nationwide patchwork of truck weights, making a national weight increase inevitable. Notably, the bill would have given governors the authority to increase interstate trucks weights based on an open-ended definition of supply chain disruptions.

NATaT opposes any effort to allow bigger trucks on our roadways. Larger, heavier trucks imperil road safety and severely impact our already weakening infrastructure, especially on local roads and bridges where these vehicles ultimately travel.

## Funding the Highway Trust Fund

### NATaT Cautions Against VMT

As federal receipts into the Highway Trust Fund continue to decline, federal policymakers are considering ways to fund the federal transportation system. One mechanism is a “vehicle miles traveled” (VMT) fee. NATaT is concerned that a VMT fee would impact rural drivers disproportionally higher than others. Studies have shown that a per-mile VMT fee of between five cents and 25 cents would increase the daily work trip costs for rural residents between $2.80 and $14 per day. NATaT wants to ensure that any effort to impose VMT fees considers the limited transportation options for rural residents and the resulting need to use their vehicles to access work and daily services.