

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# THE ROUTE TO REFORM

**BLUEPRINT** FOR A 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY  
FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION  
PROGRAM



**This is the Executive Summary** version of the *Route to Reform: Blueprint for a 21st Century Federal Transportation Program*. The Blueprint in its entirety is available on the Transportation for America website.

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# About Transportation for America



Transportation for America (T4 America) represents a broad range of national and local organizations and thousands of individuals focused on modernizing and maintaining our national transportation system infrastructure. Our members believe that sound investments in transportation are critical to the health of the nation's economy and essential for reducing our current dependence on oil.

As Congress takes up debate over the federal surface transportation program, T4 America joins many others in calling for the transformative change required to ensure our policies and programs are better aligned to serve the needs of a 21st Century America.

Congress should not shy away from restructuring the federal surface transportation program and its agencies. There is simply too much at stake for the economy, our environment, and the needs of Americans in every community across the country.

We need a bold vision for the nation's transportation infrastructure investments that promotes maximum economic benefits, access to opportunity, public health and environmental sustainability for people living in urban, suburban and rural communities. It is particularly urgent that our roads, public transportation and rail systems be made safer and more accessible for the growing numbers of older Americans. This means planning our transportation systems – and our development patterns – to ensure that there are convenient and affordable travel options available to everyone, in every community, at every stage of life.

This document represents the best thinking of many transportation professionals, public officials, and stakeholders, who were convened by T4 America to outline in detail the policy frameworks that will build a national program capable of laying the groundwork for a prosperous future. In it is our sincere hope that members of Congress and their staff will find here the thoughtful guidance they seek as they undertake a heroic rewriting of transportation policy at this pivotal moment in our nation's history.

## Acknowledgments

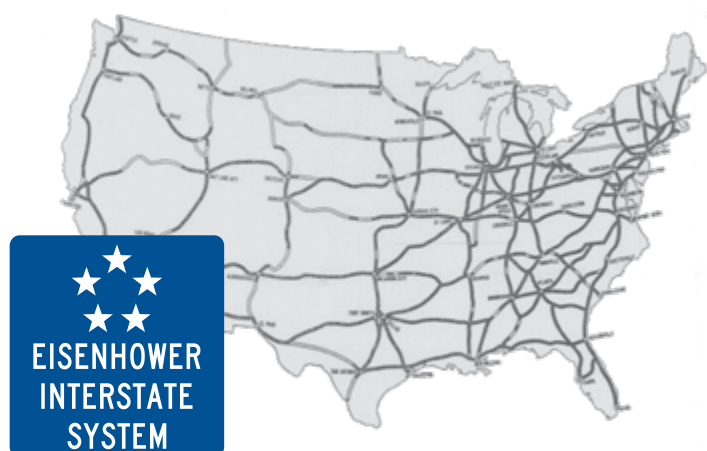
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# THE ROUTE TO REFORM

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# Executive Summary

In 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed into law the largest public works program in history, an infrastructure project that would reshape America in the 20th century. The National Interstate and Defense Highways Act, as it is commonly known, embodied a vision that America's cities and states could be linked with a network of superhighways that would allow people, commerce and the military to move rapidly from one part of the country to another.



Fifty years later, the Interstate Highway System has been built, and America stands in desperate need of a new vision for our national transportation system. Just as the Interstate highway bill answered some of the most pressing mobility needs of the rapidly growing nation in the mid-20th century, a new federal surface transportation bill must answer the vastly different needs of America in the 21st century. The next transportation program must set about the urgent task of repairing and maintaining our existing transportation assets, building a more well-rounded transportation

network, and making our current system work more efficiently and safely to create complete and healthy communities. It should invest in modern and affordable public transportation, safe places to walk and bicycle, smarter highways that use technology and tolling to better manage congestion, long-distance rail networks, and land use policies that reduce travel demand by locating more affordable housing near jobs and services. And it should put us on the path towards a stronger national future by helping us reduce our oil dependency, slow climate change, improve social equity, enhance public health, and fashion a vibrant new economy.

Getting there from here will require some significant reforms. To meet these goals, the T4 America coalition offers four main recommendations for the upcoming transportation authorization bill:

- » Develop a New National Transportation Vision with Objectives and Accountability for Meeting Performance Targets.
- » Restructure Federal Transportation Programs and Funding to Support the New National Transportation Vision and Objectives.
- » Reform Transportation Agencies and the Decision-making Process.
- » Revise Transportation Finance So We Can Pay for Needed Investments.



## Develop a New National Transportation Vision with Objectives and Accountability for Meeting Performance Targets

The next federal surface transportation bill should articulate a clear and compelling national vision with specific goals for implementation that will build and maintain a comprehensive National Transportation System. This system will be essential for helping us respond to the myriad challenges facing our nation today, including the economy, energy, public health, the environment, an aging population, and equal access and fair treatment for all communities and transportation users.

America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs a complete National Transportation System that includes safe, well-maintained, and efficient highway, rail and public transportation systems, as well as bicycling and pedestrian networks. T4 America calls on Congress to clearly **define the national interest and purpose of the federal transportation program** by adopting and implementing the following set of National Transportation Objectives:

1. Improve Economic Competitiveness, Transportation System Efficiency and Workforce Development Opportunities
2. Improve Transportation System Conditions and Connectivity
3. Promote Energy Efficiency and Achieve Energy Security
4. Ensure Environmental Protection, Restore Climate Stability and Resolve Persistent Environmental Justice Issues
5. Ensure Safety for All Transportation Users and Improve Public Health Outcomes
6. Provide Equal and Equitable Access to Transportation Options in Urban, Suburban and Rural Communities

The next federal surface transportation bill should hold state and local transportation agencies accountable for meeting the transportation needs of an increasingly diverse America and should focus on the needs of both our major metropolitan areas and our small towns and rural regions. In order to do so, the federal government should **establish performance targets** that correspond to the National Transportation Objectives, along with significant oversight measures, while looking to states and regions to develop the plans for achieving these outcomes within federal guidelines.



# National Transportation Objectives & Targets



2010-2030

## Objectives

Improve Economic Competitiveness, Transportation System Efficiency and Workforce Development Opportunities

Improve Transportation System Conditions and Connectivity

Promote Energy Efficiency and Achieve Energy Security

Ensure Environmental Protection, Restore Climate Stability and Resolve Persistent Environmental Justice Issues

Ensure Safety for All Transportation Users and Improve Public Health Outcomes

Provide Equal and Equitable Access to Transportation Options in Urban, Suburban and Rural Communities

## Performance Targets

Reduce per capita vehicle miles traveled by 16%

Triple walking, biking and public transportation usage

Reduce transportation-generated carbon dioxide levels by 40%

Reduce delay per capita by 10%

Increase proportion of freight transportation provided by railroad and intermodal services by 20%

Achieve zero percent population exposure to at-risk levels of air pollution

Improve public safety and lower congestion costs by reducing traffic crashes by 50%

Increase share of major highways, regional transit fleets and facilities, and bicycling/pedestrian infrastructure in good state of condition by 20%

Reduce average household combined housing + transportation costs 25% (use 2000 as base year)

Increase by 50% essential destinations accessible within 30 min. by public transit, or 15 min. walk for low-income, senior and disabled populations



## Restructure Federal Transportation Programs to Support the New National Transportation Vision and Objectives

To achieve our national goals, T4 America calls on Congress to **restructure and consolidate**, federal programs away from single-mode “silos” towards greater integration, and provide the tools for states, regions and localities to develop solutions.

A core set of **National Priority Programs** should be established for:

- » Outcome-Based Planning;
- » System Preservation and Renewal;
- » Access, Independence and Mobility Management for Seniors, Disabled and Low-Income Families;
- » Transportation Safety; and,
- » Energy Security for Clean Communities.

The next bill should include a set of multimodal programs, **geographically tailored** to meet mobility needs at the inter-regional, metropolitan, small town and rural levels to support highways, passenger and freight rail, public transportation and bicycle and pedestrian projects. It should also provide cities with direct funding for project implementation and provide new operating funding for public transportation agencies.



The programs established in the next transportation bill should help us **complete our national transportation system**, with particular focus on expanding transportation options. Transportation for America supports programs that will build a modern, intercity passenger rail network, “green” our freight transport systems and our ports, and expand high-quality public transportation and bicycling and pedestrian networks within metropolitan areas. The goal of our investment program must be a nationally interconnected system of roads, rail, public transportation, pedestrian, and bicycling facilities.

Finally, a set of **Innovation Programs** should be created to spur states and communities to advance state-of-the-art transportation policies into state-of-the-practice. Strategies could include increasing research and development of new system management technologies, pursuing innovative least-cost projects, and implementing policies that anticipate future needs and demands.



## Proposed Federal Transportation Structure

### Geographically-Tiered Multimodal Access Program

Statewide Multimodal Access Program

Metropolitan Multimodal Access Program

Local Multimodal Access Program for Cities and Rural Regions

### Programs to Complete the National Transportation System

Intercity Passenger Transportation Program

Green Freight and Ports

Major Transit Capital Projects

Projects of National Significance

## National Transportation Priority Programs



Planning and Research

Transportation System Preservation and Renewal

- State of Good Highway, Road, Trails, and Bridge Repair

- State of Good Transit Repair

Access, Independence and Mobility Management

Transportation Safety

Energy Security for Clean Communities

## Innovation Incentive Programs

Sustainability Challenge Grants

Smart Communities Program

Active Transportation

## Reform Transportation Agencies and the Decision-making Process

When the United States Congress passed the National Interstate Highways and Defense Act of 1956, it empowered the states to construct the 41,000-mile system of superhighways to connect the nation. Fifty years later, with most Americans living in metropolitan areas, our primary challenge is mobility within cities and their suburbs, rather than between regions. America's metropolitan regions face complex challenges that demand new approaches and more responsive institutions. T4 America believes that, along with greater ac-

countability, there must also be more local voices and local control in the transportation decision-making process.

T4 America proposes **empowering regions** to shape their future by giving them more direct funding and decision-making authority, while holding them accountable for results. The T4 America platform also calls for new approaches and practices such as “complete streets” policies that are designed to meet the needs of all users; the adoption of flexible design and mobility guidelines that emphasize cost-effectiveness; a new stormwater policy standard to reduce water pollution from federally funded roadways; new incentives for affordable housing near public

transportation; and local hiring and workforce development provisions to boost green jobs nationwide.

At the same time, the federal program must acknowledge the powerful, inevitable interaction between transportation investments and local growth and development, as well as the profound impact that development patterns have on the nation's economic, environmental and energy goals.

T4 America proposes a new **Blueprint Program** that would empower major metropolitan areas with direct transportation funding and greater authority to select projects, in return for progress toward meeting national objectives. In addition, we recommend that state Departments of Trans-

portation (DOTs) be required to develop statewide blueprints, in partnership with smaller Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), cities, and rural planning districts, that demonstrate how transportation investments across the state advance community goals and national transportation objectives. Once certified, state blueprints would provide the framework for state DOTs to lead on intercity and interstate investments, and also serve as the framework for investment decisions of funds sub-allocated to smaller MPOs, cities and rural planning districts. The Blueprint process also creates the framework to speed project selection and delivery by completing analysis of a comprehensive package of investments on the front-end.





## Revise Transportation Finance So We Can Pay for Needed Investments

In the summer of 2008, Congress had to patch the highway trust fund with an \$8 billion infusion from the general fund. A similar fix may be needed again this summer. The nation needs to develop a sustainable method of raising revenue for federal transportation programs. **Increased revenues for transportation are needed, and T4 America is prepared to support a near-doubling of the current federal investment to roughly \$500 billion over the next six years. However, neither we nor the American public will support this increase unless it is linked to real reform and can produce the sort of results outlined in this proposal.**

T4 America believes the nation must diversify the funding sources for transportation and engage in an aggressive effort to spur innovation and develop new revenue strategies. Existing revenue projections for both the short and long term, coupled with growing needs for maintenance and construction, are clearly outstripping the capacity of the motor fuel tax. In the short run, it may be necessary to raise the federal gas tax, or to index it to inflation, in preparation for a transition to a tax based on vehicle miles traveled. This proposal includes options for other innovative finance mechanisms such as congestion pricing to pay for travel options in a given corridor, a National Infrastructure Bank, and a per-barrel surcharge on



oil. T4 America proposes three distinct revenue alternatives that each would generate over \$500 billion for the next six-year authorization period.

As new revenue sources are developed, T4 America urges Congress to reform the program to create a **Unified Transportation Trust Fund** that would allow greater integration of surface transportation systems and help to balance allocations of federal dollars in a broader portfolio of investments in rail, freight, highways, bus, and non-motorized transportation.



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