



*Many roads in rural Indian Country are unpaved and poorly graveled, which creates safety issues for those who travel for work and school.
Photo credit: Ben Sutherland*

Transportation

Transportation is critical to linking people within tribal communities to other surrounding areas, providing access for law enforcement, fire, and other emergency services, and providing communities with opportunities for sustainable economic development. Surface transportation in Indian country involves thousands of miles of roads, bridges, and highways. According to the latest National Tribal Transportation Facility Inventory (NTTFI) issued under 23 USC 202 (b)(1), there are over 159,000 miles of roads and trails in Indian country that are owned by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Indian tribes, states, and counties. However, far too many of these miles of roadways are a part of the most underdeveloped and unsafe road system in the nation, even though they represent the primary means of access to American Indian and Alaska Native communities. There are 27,500 miles of roads and trails owned by the BIA. Only 7,100 miles of these roads are paved, and the other 20,400 miles are classified as graveled, earth, or primitive. Indian tribes own 13,650 miles of roads and trails, of which only 1,000 miles are paved and 12,650 miles are classified as gravel, earth, or primitive.

Transportation infrastructure development is critical to economic development, job creation, and improving living conditions and safety for individuals and families in Indian country. Transportation is also significant to the millions of non-Natives who travel through tribal lands every day. Construction of transportation, public transit, highway safety, and maintenance programs are crucial to providing a safe and reliable transportation network for residents of tribal communities to travel to places of work, schools, healthcare facilities, and retail establishments. Safe and well-maintained transportation systems enable tribal governments to further develop their tribal economies and strengthen ties within tribal communities.

The current transportation authorization, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) expires September 30, 2014. MAP-21 restructured the transportation programs for Indian tribal governments by establishing and consolidating the Tribal Transportation Program (TTP) (formerly the Indian Reservation

Programs), eliminating the separately funded IRR Bridge Program and High Priority Project Program (IRRHPP) and creating discretionary grants within the TTP for tribal bridges and highway safety programs and projects. MAP-21 changed the regulatory funding formula for allocating TTP “tribal shares” for transportation construction that the BIA and FHWA must phase in over a number of years. MAP-21 increased funding and also revamped the Tribal Transit Program administered by the Federal Transit Administration, by establishing a statutory formula for allocating transit funds to eligible Indian tribes.

Tribal communities are vulnerable by unsafe and often inaccessible roads, bridges, and ferries. Tribal members suffer injury and death on reservation roadways at rates far above the national average. According to the Federal Highway Administration, “American Indians have the highest rates of pedestrian injury and death per capita of any racial or ethnic group in the United States.” Over the past 25 years, 5,962 fatal motor vehicle crashes occurred on Indian reservation roads, with 7,093 lives lost. While the number of fatal crashes in the nation declined 2.2 percent during this time period, the number of fatal motor vehicle crashes per year on Indian reservations increased 52.5 percent.⁶³ Adult motor vehicle-related death rates for American Indians and Alaska Natives are more than twice that of the general population. These grim statistics indicate the need for major changes in federal transportation safety programs serving Indian country.

The current cost to construct all the transportation needed in Indian Country is approximately over \$81 billion. In addition, the lingering shortfalls and flat funding levels for the BIA Road Maintenance Program over the last 30 years has compromised highway safety in Indian country, dramatically shortened the useful life of the BIA System and tribal roads and bridges, and undermined tribal economic development initiatives in Indian country. The current cost of deferred maintenance for BIA Roads is over \$290 million. These staggering amounts to meet the transportation and maintenance needs in Indian country will require a substantial commitment of federal resources in keeping with the trust responsibility.

The requested funding reflects authorized funding amounts according to the current transportation authorization, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) (P.L. 112-141).

Key Recommendations

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Transportation, HUD Appropriations Bill

Tribal Transportation Program (TTP)

- Provide \$450 million for the Tribal Transportation Program.

The Tribal Transportation Program oversees over 159,000 of roads and trails in Indian Country, which are owned by the BIA, Indian tribes, states, and counties, and providing safe and adequate transportation systems. These roadways and trails serve as the primary transportation thoroughfare for residents of and visitors to American Indian and Alaska Native communities. The Transportation Program is funded from the Highway Trust Fund and allocated through a statutory formula.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Transportation, HUD Appropriations Bill

Tribal Technical Assistance Programs (TTAPs)

- Provide \$1 million for DOT Tribal Technical Assistance Programs.

The TTAPs is the only program providing technical assistance and training for Indian tribal governments to build tribal capacity by providing training and certifying highway roads and technical experts who oversee and construct highways and roads in tribal communities. Funding support for TTAPs was not specifically designated when MAP-21 was established. However, there are currently seven TTAPs around the country serving all federally-recognized tribes, and each TTAP receives \$140,000 annually (for a total of \$980,000). An increase to \$1 million for TTAP is requested to improve tribal technical capacity for tribal transportation officials.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Bill

Tribal Transit Program

- Provide \$30 million for the Tribal Transit Program.

The Public Transportation on Indian Reservations (5311(c)) (also known as the Tribal Transit Program), is a program that enables Indian tribes to use the funding for capital, operating, planning, and administrative expenses for public transit projects to meet the needs of public transportation in rural tribal communities.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Bill

Tribal High Priority Projects Program

- Fund the Tribal High Priority Projects Program for \$30 million.

Prior to MAP-21, the Tribal High Priority Projects Program (THPPP) received its funding separately from the Highway Trust Fund. Yet under MAP-21, this separate funding was eliminated, and THPPP was authorized to receive its funding from the General Fund. However, since the enactment of MAP-21, the THPPP has not been funded. This program is crucial to tribal governments to complete their highest priority projects, which often include efforts to repair and reconstruct facilities following an emergency or natural disaster.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Interior - Environment Appropriations Bill

BIA Roads Maintenance

- Provide \$30 million for the BIA Road Maintenance Program.

Currently, BIA needs \$290 million per year to maintain BIA-owned roads and bridges to an adequate standard. Costs to maintain these roads have risen sharply due to high inflation for construction. However, for FY 2013, only \$25 million has been appropriated for BIA roads maintenance. It is critical that \$30 million be appropriated for the BIA Road Maintenance program in FY 2015.