



Transportation

The economy in Indian Country is dependent upon transportation infrastructure – without safe and well maintained roads, bridges, and adequate public transportation, tribal nations would be unable to provide essential services to their citizens. Tribal nations construct, improve, and maintain transportation infrastructure and facilities that are used by tribal citizens and nontribal citizens alike. Investment in tribal transportation infrastructure improves public safety and commerce at the tribal, federal, state, and local levels.

The most recent National Tribal Transportation Facility Inventory (NTTFI) reports there are approximately 161,000 miles of roads and trails in Indian Country eligible for federal funding. Of those, Indian tribes own and maintain 13,650 miles of roads and trails, of which only 1,000 (or 7.3 percent) are paved, and 12,650 miles are gravel, earth, or primitive. Of the 29,400 miles owned and maintained by the BIA, 75 percent are gravel, earth, or primitive. All combined, the 42,000 miles of roads are still among the most underdeveloped, unsafe, and poorly maintained road networks in the nation, even though they are the primary means of access to American Indian and Alaska Native communities by Native and non-Native residents and visitors alike.

Another federal transportation program that is vital to infrastructure in Indian Country is the BIA Road Maintenance Program, which is funded and authorized under the Department of the Interior and is separate from the Department of Transportation appropriation. The BIA Road Maintenance Program is critical to BIA owned roads and facilities. Currently, BIA is responsible for maintaining approximately 29,400 miles of roads in Indian Country including 900 bridges. The BIA Road Maintenance program received funding of about \$30 million in FY 2017, while deferred maintenance has risen to \$498 million for FY 2018. The condition of these roads is increasingly concerning for tribal citizens and all surrounding communities. The lack of sufficient transportation infrastructure also hampers economic development opportunities for tribal nations and their citizens. The integrity of the transportation infrastructure systems in Indian County includes not only TTP and Tribal Transit Programs but it also includes BIA-owned roads and facilities that have a direct impact on tribal and surrounding non-tribal communities.

According to a recent GAO Report published in May 2017, “Better Data Could Improve Road Management and Inform Indian Student Attendance Strategies”⁹⁵ the BIA did not provide adequate documents on road maintenance and no process exists for tribal nations to properly report on road maintenance. The BIA conducted a road maintenance survey, which found that the cost of road maintenance more than doubled the allocated amount of funding for proper maintenance in FY 2017 and that deferred maintenance had risen to \$498 million. Further data on road maintenance is needed to adequately address the deferred maintenance of roads throughout Indian Country.

It is imperative federal funding levels for the Tribal Transportation Program (TTP), Tribal Technical Assistance Program (TTAP), Tribal Transit Program, and BIA Road Maintenance Program are increased. For many tribal governments, this federal funding is the only funding source to improve or maintain road systems.

Key Recommendations

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Transportation, HUD Appropriations Bill Tribal Transportation Program (TTP)

- ***Provide \$505 million for the Tribal Transportation Program.***

The Tribal Transportation Program oversees over 160,000 miles of roads and trails in Indian Country, which are owned by the BIA, tribal nations, states, and counties, in order to provide 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 Tribal 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

- ***Provide \$5 million for Tribal Technical Assistance Programs.***

The Tribal Technical Assistance Program (TTAP) is the only program providing technical assistance and training for tribal nations to build capacity through training and technical assistance from experts who oversee and construct highways and roads in tribal communities. In fall 2016, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) announced the restructuring of the TTAP, and eliminated the seven TTAPs around the country that served all 573 federally-recognized tribal nations. In December 2017, the FHWA announced a two year pilot program and centralized the TTAP at the University of Virginia, Center for Transportation Studies (CTS) in Virginia. The entire restructuring has proceeded without proper tribal consultation. NCAI is deeply concerned about the restructuring of TTAP without tribal input. NCAI requests a \$5 million increase to TTAP funding, in order to improve technical expertise for tribal transportation officials and to ensure proper tribal consultation is carried out by FHWA regarding the restructuring of the TTAP.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Bill Tribal Transit Program

- ***Provide \$35 million for the Tribal Transit Program.***

The Public Transportation on Indian Reservations (5311(c)) (also known as Tribal Transit Program), is a program that enables tribal nations 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. This program continues to be a successful program for tribal governments.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Bill
Tribal High Priority Projects Program**

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

In the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, P.L. 114-94, the Tribal High Priority Projects Program (THPP) was not authorized. This very critical program is needed for the safety and welfare of tribal and surrounding non-tribal communities. The THPP program is crucial for tribal nations to support completion of their highest priority projects, which often include reconstruction efforts as a result of an emergency or natural disaster.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**Interior - Environment Appropriations Bill
BIA Road Maintenance**

- *Provide \$50 million for the BIA Road Maintenance Program.*

Currently, BIA has a deferred maintenance backlog to maintain BIA-owned roads and bridges to an adequate standard. As part of a recent survey conducted by the BIA, the deferred maintenance backlog throughout Indian Country is estimated in excess of \$490 million. For FY 2018, \$34.6 million was appropriated for BIA roads maintenance, and has remained steadily around this amount for prior fiscal years, while maintenance need continues increase. The relatively high inflation of construction costs has diminished the purchasing power of these inadequate funds even further. Increased funding for the BIA Road Maintenance program is needed in order to begin to address public safety and commercial activity concerns that affect all Americans. NCAI requests \$50 million to begin to address the deferred roads maintenance need in Indian Country.