



Transportation

In order for tribal governments to develop and bolster their economic development, a necessary component is transportation infrastructure. Tribal transportation programs are critical to ensuring that tribal governments can provide for the economic and social well-being of their tribal members and members of the surrounding communities. Surface transportation in Indian Country involves thousands of miles of roads, bridges, and highways. According to the latest National Tribal Transportation Facility Inventory (NTTFI), there are approximately 160,000 miles of roads and trails in Indian Country owned and maintained by tribes, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), states and counties. 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, with another 12,650 miles consisting of gravel, earth, or primitive materials. Of the 29,400 miles owned and maintained by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, 75 percent of them are graveled, earth, or primitive. When combined, the roads owned and maintained by Indian tribes and the BIA are among the most underdeveloped and unsafe 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.

Therefore, safety issues continue to be among the biggest challenges for tribal nations because many tribal communities are vulnerable due to unsafe and often inaccessible roads, bridges, and ferries. 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. Adult motor vehicle-related death rates for American Indians/Alaska Natives are more than twice that of the general population. These statistics are alarming and call for major changes in federal transportation safety programs serving Indian Country.

The current cost to construct all the transportation needs in Indian Country is approximately \$81.6 million. Indian Country will require a substantial commitment of federal resources in keeping with the trust responsibility to meet maintenance and transportation needs for tribal governments and citizens. In addition, another surface transportation program that has a growing shortfall while receiving flat funding for several fiscal years is the BIA Road Maintenance Program. These deficits over several fiscal years has compromised highway safety in Indian

country, dramatically shortened the useful life of the BIA transportation system and tribal roads and bridges, and undermined tribal economic development initiatives in Indian country.

Bureau of Indian Affairs Road Maintenance Program

Although the majority of transportation programs are authorized and funded through the Department of Transportation, there is one critical tribal transportation program located within the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). This program, the BIA Road Maintenance program is responsible for maintaining approximately 29,400 miles of roads in Indian Country including 900 bridges. The funding for this program has steadily declined for several fiscal year cycles and is currently funded at \$26 million for FY 2015. This inadequate funding has compromised highway safety in Indian Country, dramatically shortening the useful life of the BIA System and tribal roads and bridges, and undermining tribal economic development initiatives in Indian Country.

The current deferred maintenance for BIA roads is over \$289 million and rising. At this current level of funding, it would take more than a decade to clear the current maintenance backlog on these roads, not accounting for future maintenance needs. These staggering amounts of deferred maintenance on BIA roads directly impacts tribes. The BIA is a trustee for the tribes and must provide adequate funding to address the ever growing deferred maintenance for BIA roads. The safety of our youth, elders, tribal citizens, and non-Native neighbors depends on the adequacy of these roads.

Key Recommendations

Department of Transportation

Transportation, HUD Appropriations Bill

Tribal Transportation Program (TTP)

- *Provide \$600 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, 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. Stagnant funding of this program for many years has created a backlog of need in Indian Country that requires an increase in funding to \$600 million.

Department of Transportation

Transportation, HUD Appropriations Bill

Tribal Technical Assistance Programs (TTAPs)

- *Provide \$1.5 million for Tribal Technical Assistance Programs.*

The TTAPs is the only program providing technical assistance and training for Indian tribal governments to build tribal capacity in transportation programs 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 the 566 federal recognized tribes, and each TTAP receives \$140,000 annually (for a total of

\$980,000). NCAI requests an increase to \$1.5 million to fund existing TTAPs to improve tribal technical capacity for tribal transportation officials.

Department of Transportation

Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Bill

Tribal Transit Program

- *Provide \$40 million for the Tribal Transit Program.*

The Public Transportation on Indian Reservations program (5311(c); also known as Tribal Transit Program), is a program that enables Indian tribes to utilize funding for the capital, operating, planning, and administrative expenses for public transit projects to meet the needs of public transportation in rural tribal communities. This program has grown since funding has been provided to tribal communities and has helped meet the needs of tribes in ensuring tribal members have access to jobs, education, and medical care. NCAI requests an increase to this successful program for tribal governments and tribal citizens.

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. Because the majority of tribal transportation programs are allocated by formula and the majority of tribes lack access to capital, tribes have no federal or state funding to complete large-scale transportation projects. The THPPP fills that gap for tribes and helps tribes to meet their infrastructure needs.

Department of the Interior

Interior – Environment Appropriations Bill

BIA Roads Maintenance

- *Provide \$40 million for the BIA Road Maintenance Program.*

Currently, BIA needs approximately \$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 2015, only \$26 million has been appropriated for BIA roads maintenance, and has remained steadily near this amount for prior fiscal years, while need continues increase. It is critical that \$40 million be appropriate for the BIA Road Maintenance program in FY 2016 to begin to address the growing roads and maintenance needs.