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# TRANSPORTATION

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Tribal transportation infrastructure is a key component for tribal governments to bolster their economies. Transportation programs are critical to ensure tribal governments can provide for economic development and social well-being of their tribal citizens and to ensure the safety of non-tribal citizens who travel on tribal roads.

Surface transportation in Indian Country involves hundreds of thousands of miles of roads and highways; and hundreds of bridges. 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 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.

## FIXING AMERICA'S SURFACE TRANSPORTATION ACT

With the recent enactment of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act), came some modest increases for the Tribal Transportation and the Tribal Transit Grant programs. In addition, the FAST Act included the establishment of a tribal self-governance program within the US Department of Transportation, giving tribes the ability to implement the principles of self-determination for transportation programs throughout the Department. Other key provisions contained in the FAST Act include:

- Funding authorization for the Tribal Transportation Program at \$465 million for FY 2016; \$475 million for FY 2017; \$485 million for FY 2018; \$495 million for FY 2019; and \$505 million for FY 2020;
- Authorization for the Tribal Transit Program up to \$35 million annually;
- Establishes and expands the Tribal Self-Governance Program within USDOT;

- Decreases funding for administrative costs from the current six percent to five percent for the Tribal Transportation Program; and
- Includes increased collection of tribal data by adding reporting requirements for tribes who receive Tribal Transportation Program funding.

Unfortunately, the Tribal High Priority Project (TTPP) was not reauthorized in the FAST Act. The TTPP is currently authorized for funding only through Fiscal Year 2015. The TTPP is a significant program that provides funding Indian tribes whose annual allocation of Tribal Transportation Program funding is insufficient to complete their highest priority projects or to repair transportation infrastructure impacted by emergency or disaster events. Indian tribes who do not receive a sufficient allocation from the annual Tribal Transportation Program funding rely heavily on this program to assist in funding their most critical, and many times unforeseen, transportation projects.

The current cost to construct all of the transportation needs in Indian Country is approximately \$80 million. Indian Country requires a substantial investment of federal resources to meet transportation needs for tribal governments and surrounding areas.

## 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 been level-funded for several fiscal year cycles and is currently funded at \$26.6 million for FY 2016. 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. 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.

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.

### Key Recommendations

#### DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Transportation, HUD Appropriations Bill  
Tribal Transportation Program (TTP)

- *Provide \$475 million for the Tribal Transportation Program.*

The Tribal Transportation Program oversees over 160,000 of roads and trails in Indian Country, which are owned by the BIA, Indian tribes, states, and counties, and are relied upon to provide safe and adequate transportation. 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 \$1.5 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 by providing training and certification to technical experts who plan, oversee and construct highways and roads in tribal communities. There are currently seven TTAPs around the country serving all of the 566 federal recognized tribes. Each TTAP receives \$140,000 annually (for a total of \$980,000). NCAI requests an increase to \$1.5 million to fund additional TTAPs and 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 Tribal Transit Program), is a program that enables Indian tribes to use funding for capital, operating, planning, and administrative expenses for public transit projects to meet the public transportation needs 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 for \$30 million.*

In the recently enacted transportation authorization, the FAST Act, the Tribal High Priority Projects Program (THPP) was not authorized. NCAI requests funding for this critical program which supplements funding from the Tribal Transportation Program which is often inadequate for tribes to complete construction of their highest priority projects and for unforeseen transportation projects which arise out of natural disasters that require repair and reconstruction of primary routes.

## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### Interior - Environment Appropriations Bill BIA Roads Maintenance

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

The current maintenance backlog for BIA roads and bridges in Indian Country is approximately \$289 million. This would bring the current inventory of roads and bridges to an adequate standard. However, for FY 2016, only \$26.6 million has been appropriated for BIA roads maintenance, and this program has remained level funded for several budget cycles while the need continues to increase. It is critical that \$40 million be appropriate for the BIA Road Maintenance program in FY 2017 to begin to address the most critical maintenance needs of BIA roads in Indian Country.