

# Transportation



Tribes must have transportation infrastructure that permits safe travel and promotes economic development. Transportation infrastructure is critical to linking people within tribal communities and to other surrounding areas in order to strengthen economic development and improve the delivery of tribal government services. Within the Indian Reservation Roads Program (IRR), there are more than 120,000 miles of roads in Indian Country owned by the BIA, Indian tribes, states, and counties. However, these roadways still comprise the most underdeveloped road network in the nation, even though it is the primary transportation network for all residents of and visitors to American Indian and Alaska Native communities. More than 60 percent of the system is unimproved earth and gravel, and approximately 8,000 IRR bridges (24 percent) are classified as deficient.

These inadequate road conditions make it very difficult for tribal community residents to travel to hospitals, stores, schools, and employment centers. The poor condition of these roads, bridges, and transit systems jeopardizes the health, safety, security, and economic well-being of tribal members and the traveling public. Tribal roads and bridges are often in such disrepair that children are prevented from attending school, sick and injured people cannot reach hospitals, and emergency responders cannot provide timely assistance to people in need.

This inadequate transportation infrastructure has a tangible impact on tribal communities. Community members suffer injury and death by driving and walking along reservation roadways at rates far above the national average.<sup>xi</sup> 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.<sup>xii</sup> Adult motor vehicle-related death rates for American Indians/Alaska Natives are more than twice that of the general population.<sup>xiii</sup>

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided key funding for safety, maintenance, and construction transportation infrastructure. These investments helped a great deal but also demonstrate the need for significant changes and sustained investments in federal transportation safety programs serving Indian Country.

### *Key Recommendations*

#### DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

##### **Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Bill**

##### **Indian Reservation Roads (IRR) Programs**

- Provide \$800 million for the Indian Reservation Roads Programs.
- Provide \$75 million for the Indian Reservations Roads Bridge Program.

As outlined above, IRR roads and bridges are in serious need of sustained investment. These funding levels will support the development and maintenance of critical infrastructure to serve tribal citizens and residents in surrounding communities.

#### DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

##### **Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Bill**

##### **Tribal Technical Assistance Programs**

- Provide \$4.2 million for Tribal Technical Assistance Programs.

It has been more than a year since the authorization of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU, P.L. 109-59), expired on September 30, 2009. SAFETEA-LU is crucial to Indian Country as it authorizes all the current tribal transportation provisions, which include the Indian Reservation Roads Program (IRR), Indian Reservation Roads Bridge Program (IRRB), and the Tribal Transit Grant Program (TTGP), and other transportation programs. It is likely that SAFETEA-LU will be extended through 2011 and it is critical that Congress support adequate and sustained funding levels for tribal transportation programs.



## DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

### **Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Bill**

#### **Tribal Transit Program**

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

The SAFETEA-LU enactment included the Transportation on Indian Reservations Section 5311(c), also known as the Tribal Transit Program. This program provides tribal members with public transportation access for employment, health services, education, and business opportunities. It has been greatly successful; in the first year of operation 63 tribes were awarded transit funding. This program continues to bring severely needed transit services to Indian Country and surrounding communities.

## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### **Interior, Environment Appropriations Bill**

#### **BIA Roads Maintenance**

- Provide \$150 million for the BIA Road Maintenance Program.

In 2003, the BIA formally acknowledged that at least \$120 million per year was needed to maintain BIA-owned roads and bridges to an adequate standard, and \$50 million per year was needed for bridge rehabilitation and replacement.<sup>xiv</sup> Costs to maintain these roads have risen sharply in the past five years due to high inflation costs for construction, yet in FY2010-11, only \$26.5 million was enacted for roads maintenance at BIA.

