



*This road improved with ARRA funds is vital to bringing visitors to the Acoma Pueblo's Sky City Cultural Center, an educational destination for visitors and a cultural center for tribal members.*

*Credit: National Congress of American Indians.*

## TRANSPORTATION

Surface transportation in Indian Country involves thousands of miles of roads, bridges, and highways, and connects and serves both tribal and non-tribal communities. Millions of Americans and eight billion vehicles travel reservation roads annually. Despite being the principal transportation system for all residents of and visitors to tribal communities, reservation roads are still the most underdeveloped road network in the nation.

Currently, there are over 140,000 miles of Indian reservation roads with multiple owners, including the Bureau of Indian Affairs, American Indian tribes, states, and counties. Construction of transportation systems that allow for safe travel and promote economic expansion will help strengthen tribal communities, while also making valuable contributions to much of the surrounding rural America. Maintenance and enhancement of transportation infrastructure is critical to economic development, job creation, and improving living conditions for individuals and families throughout Indian Country.

### Key Recommendations

#### DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

*Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Bill*

#### Indian Reservation Roads (IRR) Programs

- Provide \$500 million for the Indian Reservation Roads Programs.
- Provide \$20 million for the Indian Reservation Roads Bridge Program.

Deficient transportation infrastructure is a barrier which impedes economic development in Native communities. Tribal governments are working to improve public safety, education, health care, and housing, and generate jobs through economic development. These worthy objectives are more difficult to achieve when transportation infrastructure in Indian Country continues to lag behind the rest of the nation.

Tribal nations require sustained and adequate federal transportation appropriations to address the large backlog of deferred road and bridge construction and road maintenance needs. Investing in tribal transportation will create jobs and make Native economies stronger.

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The officials at the Departments of the Interior and Transportation have recognized that transportation systems within Indian Country are suffering from a nearly \$40 billion construction backlog. An equally daunting backlog exists for deferred maintenance for tribal transportation facilities. Rising construction inflation rates continue to diminish the purchasing power of the limited federal funds currently provided to the IRR Program and other tribal transportation programs. Even solid tribal roads and bridges fall into disrepair and require costly reconstruction years before the end of their design life due to a lack of more cost-effective maintenance funding. Under any assessment, tribal transportation programs remain severely underfunded and the construction and maintenance funding backlog will only get worse without significant funding increases during the next highway reauthorization period.

## DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

*Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Bill*

### Tribal Technical Assistance Programs

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

The Tribal Technical Assistance Program is the only technical assistance program that provides much-needed education and training to tribal governments for transportation road projects. Education and certification is important to assist in building a viable tribal transportation workforce. In addition, having a skilled workforce enables American Indian tribes and Alaska Native villages to further develop tribal transportation infrastructure.

## DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

*Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Bill*

### Tribal Transit Program

- Provide \$20 million for the Tribal Transit Program.

The Tribal Transit Program provides transit funding through a national competitive grant process to federally-recognized tribes. The Tribal Transit Program funding level began at \$8 million for FY 2006 and increased to \$15 million for FY 2010. Since the initiation of the Tribal Transit Program, the Federal Transit Administration has awarded approximately 236 grants to tribes totaling \$60 million. However, the total amount requested by tribes who have applied for the Tribal Transit program is approximately \$189 million. The awarded funding has been a positive first step in addressing the immense need for public transportation in Indian Country. However, the overall need still remains unmet.

## DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR

*Interior - Environment Appropriations Bill*

### BIA Roads Maintenance

- Provide \$35 million for the BIA Road Maintenance Program.

In 2003, the BIA formally acknowledged that at least \$150 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>33</sup> Costs to maintain these roads have risen sharply in the past five years due to high inflation costs for construction. Yet between FY 2010 and FY 2011, only \$26.5 million was enacted for roads maintenance at BIA. It is essential that \$35 million be appropriated for the BIA Road Maintenance program in FY 2013 to begin to address this significant gap.