



Interstate 84 cuts across the Umatilla Indian Reservation. The over 160,000 miles of roads in Indian Country comprise the most underdeveloped roadway network in the nation, yet are the primary transportation system for residents of and visitors to American Indian and Alaska Native communities. Photo credit: Ellen McFadden

Transportation

Surface transportation in Indian Country includes thousands of miles of roads, bridges, and highways, connecting and serving both tribal and non-tribal communities. As such, transportation infrastructure development is critical to economic development, creating jobs, and improving living conditions for Native individuals and families, as well as the millions of Americans who travel through our communities every day. Construction of transportation systems that allow for safe travel and promote economic expansion will help strengthen tribal nations, while making valuable contributions to surrounding communities and the nation as a whole.

In order for tribal nations to prosper, tribes must invest in transportation infrastructure, which is a critical component of fostering economic development, contributing to community health and wellness, (e.g., ensuring tribal members can travel safely to participate in cultural ceremonies and to access health care facilities), ensuring delivery of tribal government services to tribal citizens, and connecting tribal communities with surrounding communities.

Key Recommendations

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Transportation, HUD Appropriations Bill

Tribal Transportation Program

- *Provide \$450 million for the Department of Transportation's Tribal Transportation Program.*

In July 2012, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) legislation was enacted into law, authorizing current transportation programs for two additional fiscal years. MAP-21 reorganized transportation programs for tribal governments in two major ways. First, MAP-21 consolidated the previous Indian Reservation Programs into the newly established Tribal Transportation Program. The newly named Tribal Transportation Program oversees the over 160,000 miles of roads in Indian Country, which are owned by tribes, the BIA, states, and counties. Though these roadways serve as the primary transportation thoroughfare for residents of and visitors to Native communities, tribal roads comprise some of the most underdeveloped roadway network in the nation.

MAP-21 brought major restructuring of transportation programs for tribal governments, which could lead to needed reforms and improvements in sustaining a robust tribal transportation system. But these reforms must be adequately funded—especially as the link between a community's transportation system and its wellness is clear. Tribal roads and bridges are often in such disrepair that children are prevented from attending school, sick and injured people are prevented from reaching hospitals, and emergency responders are delayed in providing timely assistance to people in need. This is not something that other isolated localities are facing, but the strength of tribal road systems is a matter of national concern and must be a priority.

We know that due to unsafe and often inaccessible roads, bridges, and ferries, American Indian and Alaska Native peoples suffer preventable injuries and death by driving and walking along Indian Country roadways at rates far above the national average.⁵¹ Over the past 25 years, 5,962 fatal motor vehicle crashes occurred on 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 reservations increased 52.5 percent.⁵² Adult motor vehicle-related death rates for American Indians and Alaska Natives are more than twice that of non-Natives.⁵³ In other words, the poor condition of roads, bridges, and transit systems jeopardizes the health, safety, security, and economic well-being of tribal citizens and the traveling public. Thus, funding to improve tribal transportation and roadway systems can contribute directly to improved socioeconomic conditions in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Transportation, HUD Appropriations Bill

Tribal Technical Assistance Programs (TTAPs)

- Provide \$1 million for DOT Tribal Technical Assistance Programs.

The TTAPs are the only programs that provide technical assistance and training for tribal governments to train and certify 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 566 federally recognized tribal governments, and each TTAP receives \$140,000 annually (for a total of \$980,000). An increase to \$1 million to fund TTAP would enhance the technical training and assistance 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.

MAP-21 established a formula-based distribution of the Public Transportation on Indian Reservation funding. In determining funding amounts, the formula considers vehicle revenue miles and the number of low-income individuals residing on tribal lands. In the previous transportation authorization, 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 THE INTERIOR

Interior - Environment Appropriations Bill

BIA Roads Maintenance

- Provide \$30 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.⁵⁴ 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 appropriated for roads maintenance at BIA. It is essential that \$30 million be appropriated for the BIA Road Maintenance program in FY 2014 to begin to address this significant gap.