



**COMPASS**  
COMMUNITY PLANNING ASSOCIATION  
of Southwest Idaho

## COMPASS FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION POLICY POSITIONS APPROVED BY COMPASS BOARD OF DIRECTORS AUGUST 15, 2011

### **LONG-TERM AUTHORIZATION PROPOSAL NECESSARY**

**COMPASS supports the traditional six-year reauthorization of the Transportation Authorization Act.** Transportation project planning and construction requires predictability and certainty in regulatory requirements and funding availability to be successful. By adopting a six-year authorization proposal, Congress will provide more stability to state and local transportation planning. A shorter term reauthorization severely limits the ability of states and local entities to properly plan and schedule construction and maintenance.

### **FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION FUNDING**

#### **Federal Fuel Tax**

**COMPASS supports an increase in the federal fuel tax and supports indexing the fuel tax rate to inflation.** The federal fuel tax has not been increased since 1993, buying power has decreased and political challenges associated with fuel tax increases have had a negative effect on the nation's infrastructure investments. The Highway Trust Fund is headed toward insolvency and must be stabilized to provide predictable funding for transportation infrastructure.

#### **Funding Diversification**

**COMPASS supports implementation of diversified transportation user fee concepts to reduce the sole reliance on fuel tax to fund the Highway Trust Fund, including implementation of Alternative Fuel Vehicle fee system.** Improvements in fuel efficiency and development of alternative fuel vehicles have negatively impacted the Highway Trust Fund Account. Such vehicles still use our nation's roadway infrastructure, however, and should be required to contribute user fees to the construction and maintenance of that infrastructure.

#### **Public-Private Partnership Incentives**

**COMPASS supports providing greater incentives for private investment in roadway, bridge, and alternative transportation infrastructure.** There is currently little incentive for private financing or engagement in public-private partnerships to fund transportation infrastructure. This leaves the total cost of infrastructure in the hands of governments, an increasingly challenging financing mechanism. Expansion of the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation (TIFIA) program is one example under consideration, although the effectiveness of such programs in rural states like Idaho remains unclear.

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**Environmental and Approval Process “Streamlining”**

**COMPASS supports requiring federal agency adherence to strict approval/decision timelines/deadlines.**

**COMPASS supports federal management agency “team” approach to environmental review. Multiple agency review would be conducted on a concurrent basis -- rather than time-consuming sequential manner -- to compress decision-making timelines.**

**COMPASS supports expedited environmental review process for projects that could move quickly or are funded with greater share of state/local/private matching funds.**

Federally funded infrastructure projects typically take on the magnitude of years longer to complete and cost much more than locally funded projects. This delay and expense is largely due to a lack of timeliness in the federal agency decision making process and the “silo” effect of multiple agency jurisdiction approval. Congress should streamline and condense the process by requiring federal agencies to review projects concurrently, setting hard deadlines for federal agencies to approve projects and delegating more decision-making authority to states and local planning entities.

**COMPASS strongly encourages our federal representatives to recognize the extreme costs associated with rules and regulations as they currently exist and reduce them.** Federal regulatory requirements add time and costs to transportation planning and construction projects. According to the U.S. General Accounting Office, it takes between nine and 19 years to plan, gain approval of, and construct a new major federally funded highway project. Regulatory requirements and rules governing federal projects are a major factor in timing and cost. Federal regulation should be addressed to balance needed environmental protections with the efficient delivery of all modes of transportation improvements.

**Program Consolidation**

**COMPASS supports the concept of program consolidation with increased flexibility for states and metropolitan planning organizations.** Currently there are over 100 federal surface transportation programs which complicate and limit the ability of states and local planning entities to plan for and construct projects of local and regional significance. COMPASS supports consolidation of these programs with added flexibility for states and local entities to meet mutually agreed upon needs.

**COMPASS supports continued federal support for non-motorized transportation.** Funding of programs specifically for pedestrians and bicyclists and incentives and encouragement to participate in and to provide safe bicycle and pedestrian mobility options should remain a priority for Congress. Federally funded transportation projects should continue to incorporate safe bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

**Federal Highway Program (FHWA) State/Local Match Rate**

**COMPASS opposes increases in the state/local match requirement rate.** States and local governments have difficulty meeting current match rates for federal highway projects. An increase in the match rate formula will make it more difficult for local projects to be completed.

**Public Transportation Programs**

**COMPASS supports increases in federal funding for public transportation.**

Congress should adopt a bill that provides robust growth in the federal public transportation program to help transit systems meet the mobility needs of their communities. A stagnant economy and increased gas prices have made communities more reliant on public transportation, yet the ability of public transportation entities to meet the needs is limited. Public transportation providers in both urban and rural areas of Idaho operate on very limited funding.

**COMPASS supports allowing more flexibility in use of Sec. 5307 public transportation funds for use in operating assistance for large public transportation operations.** In urbanized areas (greater than 200,000 population), public transportation providers are not allowed to use Sec. 5307 funds for operating assistance, limiting the level of service they can provide to the community. After the 2010 Census, public transportation services currently provided by Valley Regional Transit to the Nampa urbanized area will be at risk because Sec. 5307 funds may no longer be eligible for operating assistance to that area. COMPASS supports the proposal to eliminate that limitation.

**Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO)**

**COMPASS opposes changes to the current federal population trigger of 50,000 required to form a metropolitan planning organization.** Metropolitan planning organizations provide a platform for local governments and state transportation agencies to engage in coordinated transportation planning and funding efforts in their region. With the creation of MPOs, Congress recognized that an urbanized area's transportation system needs become more regional in nature – transportation needs don't stop at a city or county border. MPOs provide the venue to appropriately coordinate and prioritize those needs with state agencies. In Idaho, if the population trigger is increased, the MPOs in the Pocatello, Idaho Falls, Lewiston/Clarkston, and Kootenai county regions would potentially be eliminated – leaving only COMPASS in the Ada/Canyon Counties region as the only regional planning entity in the state.