

# COUNTIES CAN'T AFFORD FOR WASHINGTON TO WAIT. TELL CONGRESS TO FIX THE TRUST FUND NOW!

## Background and Talking Points

Transportation and infrastructure are critical components that support the economies of our nation's counties and improve the standard of living for all Americans. As the owners of 45 percent of the nation's roads and 230,690 bridges, and stewards of nearly a third of the nation's transit systems and airports, counties understand the nation's infrastructure needs and the cost of inaction at the federal level. Counties are invested in building and maintaining a safe, efficient transportation system that connects and serves our communities while allowing our nation's economy to remain competitive in an increasingly global market. However, counties cannot do it alone.

Transportation funding from the federal government that flows to the states and down to counties comes from the Highway Trust Fund, which collects revenues from the federal gas tax. Due to several factors, including a reduction in vehicle miles traveled, increased fuel efficiency and decreased purchasing power, the trust fund has faced growing shortfalls since 2008.

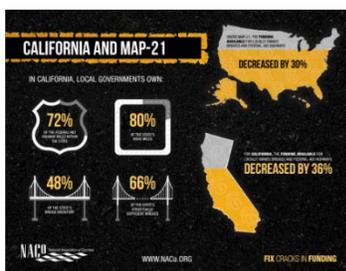
Before the current transportation authorization law, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), expires and funding runs out on May 31, 2015, Congress needs to adopt a long-term sustainable revenue source for the Highway Trust Fund that will provide sufficient funding to fix and grow our nation's transportation system.

The federal government is an important partner in delivering locally-developed transportation projects. At the local level, counties see the direct impact of federal dollars spent on transportation. In addition to moving goods and people, federal transportation investments are major economic drivers for local communities. However, in order to plan and execute large and small-scale transportation projects that are critical to commerce and the American quality of life, counties need long-term funding certainty and a reliable federal partner.

If Congress continues to kick the can down the road, counties and the transportation infrastructure they own will pay the price. When funding needs go unmet, county budgets are strained, projects are delayed, services are cut and local economies suffer the consequences. With the cost of project construction outpacing the rate of inflation, counties can't afford for Congress to wait.

The closer we get to May 31, 2015 without a resolution, the greater the threat will be to counties' infrastructure and economies. **Therefore, counties are urged to tell congress to fix the trust fund now!**

To access additional background information on the Highway Trust Fund and MAP-21, [click here](#).



## TAKE ACTION!

### Give a Tour!

While members of Congress are in their states and districts in the lead up to the November elections, county officials should invite their federal lawmakers to tour transportation facilities and projects. These site visits give legislators an opportunity to see the impacts of transportation investments in their own communities. These opportunities also support further community collaboration, which can be achieved by co-hosting a tour or event with local business leaders, other local or statewide elected officials and operators of various modes such as transit. These events are also good opportunities to earn media coverage around your advocacy. County officials should reach out to local media to make the most of these events.

### Write a Letter!

Send a letter written on county letterhead, either through the U.S. Postal Service or via email, which explains why it's critical to your county that Congress passes a long-term solution for the Highway Trust Fund. [View a draft letter to Congress here](#). Information on office locations and contact numbers can be found on members' websites. Links to U.S. House of Representatives websites can be found [here](#) and links to U.S. Senate websites can be found [here](#).

### Get Social!

Tell Congress why your county can't afford for Washington to wait via social media. Take pictures of your county's roads, bridges and transit systems that need federal support and tell Congress to #FixTheTrustFund NOW! Most Senators and Representatives are on Twitter and monitor their Twitter feeds regularly. The easiest way to find your members of Congress is to utilize the search function on Twitter or by visiting your members' website. In addition to reaching out to your members of Congress on Twitter, consider targeting House and Senate leadership.

### Sample tweets:

- @SpeakerBoehner Congressional inaction on the Highway Trust Fund is creating uncertainty for counties. #FixTheTrustFund NOW!
- @McConnellPress #Counties own 45% of roads and 40% of bridges. Counties can't afford for Congress to wait. #FixTheTrustFund NOW!
- @NancyPelosi #Counties can't afford for Congress to wait. #FixTheTrustFund NOW!
- @SenatorReid County infrastructure needs a long-term commitment from Congress. #FixTheTrustFund NOW!
- @\_\_\_\_\_ Short-term patches for the Highway Trust Fund cripple long-term transportation planning. #FixTheTrustFund NOW!
- @\_\_\_\_\_ Inadequate federal funding for roads & bridges hurts county infrastructure and local economies. #FixTheTrustFund NOW!
- @\_\_\_\_\_ Long-term federal transportation funding is critical to \_\_\_\_\_ County. #FixTheTrustFund NOW!

**For additional support on your advocacy efforts, please contact Jessica Monahan, NACo Associate Legislative Director for transportation policy at [jmonahan@naco.org](mailto:jmonahan@naco.org) or 202.942.4217.**

## TAKE ACTION!

### Engage the Media!

Work with local media outlets to draw attention to the need for an immediate Highway Trust Fund fix. Inform your community about tours and other events through press releases and advisories. NACo's [Media Relations Guide for Counties](#) is available to assist county officials with local media outreach.

Write and submit op-ed columns or guest commentaries to local newspapers outlining the local need for long-term federal investment in surface transportation and urging Congress to take action. Below are issue-specific message points to consider and general guidance on writing op-ed pieces. Remember, your ability to craft and tailor the message to fit your community is very important to placing an op-ed. County-specific examples and other local information would significantly enhance the points below.

### Op-Ed Guidance

An opinion column written in your own words for publication in your local newspaper can be a very effective communications tool. Less rigid than a news release, an opinion column – also known as an “op-ed” because it is often placed opposite of the editorial page in a newspaper – can frame issues and messages precisely the way you want. Here are some points on writing a compelling op-ed.

- An effective op-ed will make a clear and effective argument supported by facts and examples. It will be informative, focused, persuasive and interesting.
- Columns should clearly communicate why the issue is important and specifically how it affects readers.
- Op-eds are commonly written in a conversational style less formal than a news release or fact sheet.
- Connecting your position to a specific or timely issue of local importance will make it more likely that a newspaper will publish your piece.
- Typically, op-eds are 500-750 words. Newspapers often publish specific requirements and instructions for submission on their websites.
- In many cases, a newspaper will only publish your piece if it does not or will not appear in another newspaper.

### Op-Ed Format and Message Points

**The opening sentence or paragraph should grab readers' attention and spark their interest to read more. Consider starting the column with a local reference or recent news item.**

Examples:

- This holiday season, about 35 million Americans will take to our nation's roads, bridges and transit systems to visit their loved ones. But those transportation systems we often take for granted are in serious jeopardy if Congress fails to act.
- “DO NOT ENTER!” That is the message you got if you tried to cross the ABC Bridge last week. After years of wear and tear, the bridge is no longer safe to cross and we don't have the funds to fix it. We have historically looked to our federal partners for help, but Congress' failure to secure a long-term fix for the nation's transportation system has brought major projects – like the ABC Bridge repair – to a screeching halt.

## TAKE ACTION!

### Counties across the country play a critical role in our nation's transportation system.

- They own and maintain the greatest share of the nation's road miles and more than 230,000 bridges - 39 percent of the total.
- Counties are also the stewards of more than a third of the nation's transit systems.
- [Include local information and statistics describing the county role.]

### Counties are doing all they can with limited resources.

- [Give examples of the county's innovative progress on transportation.]

### Fixing funding for our roads and bridges takes leadership at all levels of government – federal, state and local.

#### Letters to the Editor Guidance

If your local paper publishes an opinion column or news article on transportation, provide the county perspective by writing a letter to the editor responding to the piece—or one of its points. Letters to the editor are a good way to spread the message in roughly 150-200 words, depending on the paper.

Example letter to the editor published in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* (Aug. 29, 2014):

#### **Transportation Funding: It also must be made a federal priority**

In addition to transportation being a focus for Minnesota candidates, as the Aug. 22 editorial suggests, it also needs to be a priority for members of Congress and congressional candidates.

Congress has failed to make long-term headway on key transportation measures — the Highway Trust Fund and the Moving Ahead for Progress for the 21st Century Act. Rather, it passed yet another stopgap measure. No great nation has ever made lasting progress on infrastructure by setting its policy six months at a time.

Fixing our roads and bridges takes leadership at all levels of government — federal, state and local. In fact, counties play a critical role; in Minnesota, they own more than a third of the public road miles and four out of 10 bridges. They are the biggest nonfederal investors in the expansion of our transit system; there would be no Green Line without county investment.

Without long-term support from our federal partners, many local government efforts are stuck in gridlock.

Peter McLaughlin, Minneapolis

The writer is a member of the Hennepin County Board and chair of the National Association of Counties Transportation Steering Committee.

**For additional support on your media relations efforts, please contact Brian Namey, NACo Director of Media Relations at [bnamey@naco.org](mailto:bnamey@naco.org) or 202.942.4220.**

#### **Tell NACo!**

Please be sure to let NACo know about your advocacy efforts. Send copies of your letters to Congress, pictures from events and media coverage to Jessica Monahan, NACo's Associate Legislative Director for transportation policy at [jmonahan@naco.org](mailto:jmonahan@naco.org) or 202.942.4217.

## Sample Letter to Congress

The Honorable [congressional member's name]  
[Address]  
Washington, DC

Dear (member's name):

Please work with your colleagues in Congress to ensure that the federal government continues investing in our infrastructure. Before the current transportation authorization law, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) expires and funding runs out on May 31, 2015, Congress needs to identify a long-term sustainable revenue source for the Highway Trust Fund that will provide sufficient funding to fix and grow our nation's transportation system.

Transportation and infrastructure are critical components that support the economies of our nation's counties and improve the standard of living for all Americans. As the owners of 45 percent of the nation's roads and 230,690 bridges, and stewards of nearly a third of the nation's transit systems and airports, counties understand the nation's infrastructure needs and the cost of inaction at the federal level. Counties are invested in building and maintaining a safe, efficient transportation system that connects and serves our communities while allowing our nation's economy to remain competitive in an increasingly global market. However, we cannot do it alone.

The federal government is an important partner in delivering locally-developed transportation projects. At the local level, we see the direct impact of federal dollars spent on transportation. In addition to moving goods and people, federal transportation investments are major economic drivers for local communities. If funding needs go unmet, county budgets are strained, projects are delayed and services are cut, and local economies suffer the consequences.

In order to plan and execute large and small-scale transportation projects that are critical to commerce and the American quality of life, federal transportation programs need a reliable, steady source of revenue. For far too long, the Highway Trust Fund has been on a path toward insolvency. Although Congress has taken action to provide temporary solutions, the lack of long-term funding at the federal level has created uncertainty for counties, which inhibits our ability to plan and deliver projects.

I urge you to do what's best for our nation's infrastructure, economy and local communities by finding a long-term solution for the Highway Trust Fund. The closer we get to May 31, 2015 without a resolution, the greater the threat will be to my county's infrastructure and economy. Therefore, I encourage you and your colleagues in Congress not to wait but to act now.

Sincerely,