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Priorities and Principles
For A New Authorization of Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity
Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU)

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The California State Association of Counties (CSAC), representing all 58 counties in California, has developed the following priorities and guiding principles for the authorization of a new federal transportation funding act. While we refer to the authorization of a new act as a “reauthorization” of the current act – SAFETEA-LU – CSAC supports the idea of creating a new and visionary act which builds upon the existing successful programs currently being implemented under SAFETEA-LU, but is also redesigned and streamlined to meet the needs of a national transportation system that faces unique challenges unlike any other time in history. A simple “reauthorization” of the existing act will not provide us with the tools necessary to meet these challenges. These priorities and principles are aimed at improving the current federal transportation funding act as well as at addressing new and significant policy issues that require attention in the next reauthorization. CSAC is committed to assisting with the development of the next generation of federal transportation funding to ensure that our nation’s transportation system allows us continued economic prosperity and is safe, secure, well-maintained, and that previous and future investments are preserved. Additionally, the next act should be environmentally sustainable and provide for a multitude of transportation options that are equitable and accessible to all Americans.

General Objectives

- Support a more streamlined and flexible approach to allocating federal funds, in which federal programs provide state, regional, and local agencies the ability to allocate federal funds for a range of highway, transit, local road, and bicycle/pedestrian improvements based on need. This could take shape by reducing the current 108 programs under SAFETEA-LU into a smaller number of more flexible programs, such as the 10 new federal programs recommended by the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission. Regardless of what a more streamlined act looks like, the following are priorities that should be included in the next reauthorization:

Protect and Enhance Transportation Revenues and Expenditures

- Enhance revenues and keep the Highway Users Trust Fund solvent. This includes support for an increase and/or index of the federal gas tax.
- When considering consolidating existing programs, retain support for core programs such as preservation and safety.

Protect Previous and Future Investments via System Maintenance and Preservation

- Provide increased funding as it is critically needed to provide for adequate maintenance and preservation of both the existing local and state transportation systems.
- Provide increased funding for preventative maintenance on bridges.

Increase Safety on Existing Transportation System

- Increase funding for safety infrastructure projects on the existing transportation system, with an emphasis on programs/projects aimed at reducing fatalities, especially on the rural road system where fatality rates are the highest. Specifically, support and increase funding for the High Risk Rural Road Program (HRRR).
- Ensure funding for the implementation of the Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP).
- Promote and increase funding for bicycle and pedestrian safety projects and programs.

Improve Environmental Stewardship and Address Climate Change Concerns

- Provide financial incentives to States that adopt and set greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions targets and programs to accomplish those targets.
- Provide funding to mitigate GHG emissions impacts in addition to air, water, and other environmental impacts.
- Provide incentives in current programs and/or provide new funding sources for climate change neutral or friendly transportation projects and programs. For instance, local street and road maintenance and preservation programs do not add to the GHG emission inventory and actually provide GHG emissions benefits by getting the traveling public to their destinations more quickly and efficiently.
- Provide financial incentives for rural sustainability. Understanding that every community in the nation must grow more efficiently in order to successfully combat climate change, jurisdictions that implement GHG emissions reductions strategies that focus on city-oriented growth and require conservation of critical resource and agricultural lands within the unincorporated area should be compensated for the loss of property taxes and other fees and taxes so that counties can continue to provide the necessary services to all countywide area residents, including equitable access to revenues available for infrastructure investment purposes.
- Provide financial support for planning processes, at the regional and countywide level, such as California's Regional Blueprint Planning Program, that integrate transportation and land use in ways to reduce projected vehicle miles traveled and fuel consumption, promote jobs/housing proximity, and transit oriented development.
- Provide assistance for data collection and determining and quantifying GHG emission sources and levels, vehicle miles traveled and other important data to assist both local governments and regional agencies in addressing climate change in environmental documents for long-range transportation plans.
- Provide funding for retrofitting equipment and for alternate fuel infrastructure.

Streamline the Regulatory and Project Delivery Processes

- Support streamlining of federal regulations/requirements to facilitate more expeditious project delivery. For instance, mandate federal permitting agencies to meet the prescribed scheduled and deadlines that are specified in the environmental review process, reduce overhead, eliminate waste, and reduce documentation that is redundant with processes required under state law.
- Ensure that federal project oversight is commensurate to the amount of federal funding.

Increase State, Regional, and Local Agency Flexibility to Respond to Needs

- Maximize the use and flexibility of federal funds by not requiring minimum federal matches.
- Eliminate the need to program multiple phases for small projects.
- Eliminate need for TIP programming for air quality neutral projects.

Provide Assistance for Data Collection

- Provide funding, training, tools, and uniform standards for the collection of roadway and traffic data specifically for the local and rural roadways. Without adequate data on local and rural roadways it is difficult to evaluate safety performance. There are no uniform, national standards for traffic safety data collection, system analysis, and management except with reporting of fatal incidents.

For more information regarding these priorities and principles, please contact:
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