

Laws with Environmental Impacts on Transportation Programs

Two environmental laws have the most impact on highway and public transit programs in the United States and are most on the minds of members of Congress negotiating a new, six-year surface transportation authorization bill ([HR 3550](#),S 1072):

1969 National Environmental Policy Act (PL 91-190)

Arguably the broadest of federal environmental laws, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires all federal agencies to consider the environmental impact of any action they propose to take or pay for, such as road and transit projects. If such an action or project is thought to have a significant effect on the environment, an environmental impact statement is required. A number of agencies can be involved in such a review.

1970 Clean Air Act (PL 91-604)

The 1970 Clean Air Act and a major revision to the law in 1990 (PL 101-549) require the Environmental Protection Agency to set ambient air quality standards for seven pollutants — particulates (such as soot), sulfur oxides, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, ozone, hydrocarbons, and lead. The law also established standards for new sources of pollution and for motor vehicles. States and smaller areas that do not comply with existing air quality standards must have a plan to do so, and federal agencies may not finance projects in those areas unless the projects fit into the compliance plan.

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