

Federal Reauthorization Policy Paper Structure

Title: Rebuilding America

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Executive Summary

The Rebuilding America program establishes a national asset management program and would address the portions of the surface transportation network in which there is a strong Federal interest. This would include federal programs currently supporting state and local asset preservation in Washington. Whether or not major reforms to federal programs occur in the next reauthorization there is a critical need to make more money available for preserving the nation's transportation infrastructure- Washington state will need nearly \$20 Billion over the next 20 years for state and local roadways. If reforms are made, they need to result in a program that provides accountability and performance criteria, and simplifies the number of fund categories to provide flexibility to the states in project selection based on merit, and in programming. We need the ability to preserve and maintain a safe, functioning state and local transportation system supporting Washington's economy and national economic and defense interests.

Background:

The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission recommends a major reform to the existing surface transportation program. They propose a performance-driven, outcome based, mode-neutral and refocused program to pursue objectives of national interest. The Rebuilding America component establishes a national asset management program and would address the portions of the surface transportation network in which there is a strong Federal interest: Federal-aid Highways, major transit assets, intercity passenger and freight rail lines, and network connectors between our modes that complete the overall system. This program cuts across several other programs, including the Freight Transportation, Metropolitan Mobility, and Connecting America programs, and would have to be closely coordinated with those programs.

The USDOT, in conjunction with State and local transportation agencies, would define appropriate performance measures to assess the condition of key types of transportation facilities and equipment. A national asset management plan would be developed with estimates of the cost to restore these facilities, putting into place best practices of capital budgeting with full consideration of life-cycle costs. These estimates would include the costs of technological and safety upgrades to be made in conjunction with these rebuilding and preservation projects, to improve the operational and safety performance of existing facilities.

To assure the maximum effectiveness of Federal capital investment support, States, local governments, and other entities accepting Federal capital support must develop, fund, and

implement a program of asset maintenance and support over the useful life of the asset that conforms to nationally accepted standards and is frequently and independently audited. Apart from demonstrating that proposed projects under this plan are cost-effective and justified, additional Federal requirements would be kept to a minimum. In most cases, environmental and other planning requirements for rehabilitating existing facilities can be met without too much burden under current law, although reconstruction activities should be executed in a manner that also conforms to the goals of other plans.

Options :

1. Increase available funding. Establish a reduced set of national programs, driven by performance-based criteria.

Pros:

A flexible, single fund program would allow funds to be moved to projects more easily to match delivery schedule needs and cost changes. Project selection should remain performance driven. Washington is in a good position to demonstrate sound asset management. Even a two element program, with a combined NHS/IM/STP element and a Bridge element would provide reduced procedural problems and increased flexibility, while guaranteeing appropriate emphasis on critical bridge safety.

The type of federal funds should not drive the priorities for programming of projects. Priorities / needs should drive the decision of which projects are programmed. On an annual basis, WSDOT has to transfer NHS and IM funds to STP to deliver the Legislative list of projects. WSDOT also had to transfer these funds in the wake of Initiative 695. In addition, the state “assumed” \$100 million dollars of regional STP funds toward state interest projects in the wake of I-695. New federal programs simply add complexity to aligning the type of funds with the previously prioritized, legislatively approved list of projects.

Cons:

A Washington D.C. mandated performance prioritization scheme might not match our needs and be driven by other states’ priorities. States should be allowed to develop relevant performance measures and prioritization criteria in response to a framework focused on return on investment.

2. The USDOT in cooperation with the State and local agencies would define performance measures to assess the condition of key types of transportation facilities.

Pros – With or without funding level increases, using performance measures to drive programming can insure that Rebuilding America investments achieve the highest return. Nationally, a set of broad measures and goals or objectives could determine gross distribution to states of funds available in the program. States could then develop more detailed state-specific measures and goals that would ensure selection of the best projects within any state.

Cons – Unless properly designed, the national fund distribution process could wind up chasing problems and rewarding states that have done a poor job of asset management at the expense of those that have a good job, like Washington.

Subcommittee Recommendations

WSDOT is well positioned to meet general performance based mandates and supports performance management and reporting in order to provide accountability as long as state DOTs receive resources to do so, can set their own targets and specific apportionments are not tied to specific performance goals.