



U.S Department of Transportation
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News

U.S. Department of Transportation 2009 Record of Accomplishment

Improving Safety. Restoring Economic Health. Promoting Sustainability, Livability

This was one of U.S. Department of Transportation's most historic years.

It was a year that saw two visits by President Obama and Vice President Biden and a separate visit from First Lady Michelle Obama to encourage and thank employees for their role in implementing the most ambitious infrastructure investment program in more than half a century, the Economic Recovery Act. It also saw the creation of the TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) team to coordinate the department's role in the recovery.

The 2009 Car Allowance Rebate System (CARS) was the most successful short-term economic stimulus initiative in the department's history. Within a four-month period, the DOT processed more than \$2.8 billion in voucher payments for more than 21,000 automobile dealers who sold nearly 700,000 new, more fuel-efficient vehicles, and took an equal number of gas-guzzling clunkers off the road.

In January, President Obama began the policy phase of his Administration with a landmark transportation and environmental announcement, setting the bar for improved automobile fuel economy.

In the fall, Secretary LaHood created the first-ever cross-modal DOT Safety Council and tackled the issue of distracted driving. At the end of a national, two-day distracted driving summit, the Secretary announced concrete actions the Obama Administration and the Department of Transportation are taking to help put an end to the practice and make roads safer.

The nation's first Livable Communities Initiative, developed in 2009 by the Department of Transportation, will measurably enhance the quality of life for families, workers, and communities across America. This translates into federal support for more transportation choices, more public transportation, and more commercial and residential development around transportation hubs.

In December, the Department responded to a series of lengthy tarmac delays and consumer complaints with a new rule to strengthen rights and ensure fair treatment for airline passengers. The rule prohibits U.S. airlines operating domestic flights from permitting an aircraft to remain on the tarmac for more than three hours without deplaning passengers and requires carriers to provide adequate food and potable drinking water within two hours of a tarmac delay.

In his Senate confirmation hearing, Secretary LaHood laid out his primary goals in implementing President Obama’s priorities for transportation – **safety** across all modes, restoring **economic health** and promoting **sustainability and livability**. He believes the Department can positively shape the economy of the coming decades by building new transportation infrastructure and assuring that transportation policies focus on people who use the transportation system and their communities.

Reflecting on those priorities, Secretary LaHood said, “Never before have we accomplished so much for the American people in so short a time. Working together, we’ll make sure that the United States of America reaps the benefits of a modern, efficient, sustainable, and accessible transportation network.”

SAFETY

“[S]afety – on the road, on the rails, in the air, and on the water – has always been and must continue to be the central focus of the Department of Transportation. This goal must guide everything done by both the leadership of the Department and its workforce, who will be our partners in everything we do. I know the Committee established this goal when it worked to create the Department and has been dedicated to the success of the safety mission throughout its history. If confirmed, you can rely on me for the same dedication.”

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood
January 21, 2009

DOT Safety Council. Secretary LaHood demonstrated that safety is his highest transportation priority by creating the DOT Safety Council to tackle critical and cross-cutting safety issues across all transportation modes. Pioneered by Secretary LaHood, the Safety Council represents the first-ever multimodal department-wide approach to safety. The Safety Council will help guide the department’s research efforts on safety and the implement of safety management systems throughout the department.

Distracted Driving Summit. On September 30, 2009, Secretary LaHood hosted the first national summit on distracted driving. At the end of the two-day gathering, he announced concrete actions the Obama Administration and the U.S. Department of Transportation are taking to help put an end to the practice and make roads safer. During the summit, President Obama issued an Executive Order banning federal employees from texting while driving government vehicles or driving private vehicles on official government business. The ban also prohibits employees from using electronic equipment supplied by the government to text while driving any vehicle. As a result of the summit, the department is pursuing three rulemakings: The first would make it illegal for rail operators to use cell phones and other electronic devices in rail operations. The second would ban text messaging altogether and restricts the use of cell phones by truck and interstate bus operators. The last would disqualify school bus drivers convicted of texting while driving, from maintaining their commercial driver’s licenses.

Comprehensive Rail Transit Safety Legislation. Secretary LaHood called on Congress to pass the Obama Administration’s Public Transportation Safety Program Act of 2009, a new comprehensive bill to ensure a high and standard level of safety across all rail transit systems. The bill would authorize the Secretary to establish and enforce federal safety standards for rail transit systems – effectively breaking through the 1965 prohibition. The bill would also provide the Secretary the option to establish a safety program for public transportation bus systems.

Tougher Automobile Roof Standards. In April, NHTSA announced tough, new roof standards, doubling the existing roof strength requirements for light vehicles and introducing the first ever standards for heavier vehicles. The tougher roof crush

requirements are part of a comprehensive plan to address rollover crashes, which kill about 10,000 people annually. The phase-in schedule, which begins in September 2012, will be completed for all affected vehicles by the 2017 model year.

Campaigns to Stop Impaired Driving. The department launched multi-million-dollar communications campaigns promoting national enforcement crackdowns on drunk and impaired driving.

Aviation Safety. In 2009, the department succeeded in making safe skies even safer by satisfactorily resolving a longstanding labor dispute with the air traffic controllers, modernizing airports and working with pilots and unions to improve safety programs and hiring processes.

- ***NATCA Labor Agreement.*** In August, the FAA reached a landmark labor agreement with its largest union, the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) after a jointly-agreed upon mediation process. Both parties signed the three-year agreement in September, after the union ratified the deal. The agreement ended years of strained relations with the union and paved the way for the acceleration of NextGen technologies.
- ***Hudson River Airspace.*** FAA finalized a rule to enhance safety by separating low-altitude, local aircraft flights over the Hudson River from flights transiting through the river airspace. This was prompted by a mid-air collision between a plane and a sight-seeing helicopter
- ***Bird Strike Database.*** In April, the FAA released its entire Bird Strike database to the public for the first time and is working on a new version that will be much more user-friendly and will feature an improved search function.
- ***Airport Modernization.*** Working with its Federal Aviation Administration, the Department of Transportation worked to make air travel safer by modernizing airports and upgrading air traffic control technologies.
- ***Call to Action.*** In June, the FAA convened a Call to Action with airlines and pilot unions to identify immediate steps to improve safety programs and pilot hiring, training and testing at the nation's airlines. The agency followed up with 12 regional meetings around the country. Administrator Babbitt urged all air carriers to immediately adopt a policy to ensure that their pilot applicants release any records held by the FAA to the hiring air carrier and announced an expedited review of pilot flight and rest rules.
- ***International Runway Safety Conference.*** FAA held the first International Runway Safety Conference to focus on reduction and eventual elimination of runway incursions.

Truck and Bus Safety. The department took significant steps to make the roads safer for those behind the wheels of large trucks and buses and those who share the road with them. Steps included increasing truck braking distances, imposing stricter safety standards for start-up companies and launching the first national alcohol and drug strike force targeting at-risk businesses.

- ***Safer Braking Distances for Large Trucks.*** In July, the department issued tougher new braking rules for large trucks that will improve stopping distance by 30 percent. It is estimated that the new braking requirement will save 227 lives annually, prevent 300 serious injuries and reduce property damage costs by over \$169 million annually.
- ***Tougher Standards for Start-up Bus and Truck Companies.*** The department established a rigorous new evaluation and qualification protocol for all new start-up commercial truck and bus companies. Failure to meet these elevated and comprehensive safety measurement standards by "New Entrant" carriers will result in the immediate revocation of DOT Operating Authority in addition to fines and other FMCSA enforcement actions.
- ***Drug and Alcohol Strike Force Targeting High Risk Companies.*** The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) recently completed the first national drug and alcohol strike force targeting "high risk" commercial bus and truck companies. In all, 77 commercial vehicle drivers were taken off the road while 80 companies received fines for failure to comply with federal drug and alcohol testing regulations.
- ***Hours of Service.*** In March, the department responded to advocacy groups asking that the Bush Administration 2008 Hours of Service Rule permitting 11-hour driving shifts for truckers be overturned. FMCSA has agreed to review the rule and then submit a new proposed rule to OMB in 2010.
- ***Motor Coach Safety Action Plan.*** A new Motorcoach Safety Action Plan addresses major safety issues such as driver fatigue and inattention, vehicle rollover, occupant ejections and oversight of unsafe carriers. The plan proposes enhanced regulatory oversight of new and high risk motorcoach operators, as well as the increased use of new technologies and proposes to initiate rulemaking to prohibit texting and limit the use of cellular telephones and other devices by motorcoach drivers. The plan proposes to better protect motorcoach occupants by requiring the installation of seat belts and discusses additional measures such as the establishment of performance requirements for enhanced roof strength, fire safety, and emergency egress.

Railroad Safety. Newly required Positive Train Control (PTC) integrated technologies on the nation's major freight rail lines and commuter and intercity passenger rail routes will help avert train-to-train collisions and derailments caused by excessive speed and accidents caused by human error.

Natural Gas and Hazardous Liquid Pipeline Safety. DOT issued new regulations for operators of natural gas and hazardous liquid pipelines requiring operators of natural gas distribution pipelines meet integrity management standards that are similar to those that apply to larger transmission pipelines. New regulations also require strengthened management and oversight of control room operations.

RESTORING ECONOMIC HEALTH

“I do not need to tell anyone here about the severe economic challenges we face – more than a million jobs lost in 2008 and unfortunately more to come in 2009. The President-elect and the members of his economic team have spoken extensively about the need for quick action, and the economic recovery and renewal plan currently under discussion responds directly to this need. Transportation infrastructure is a substantial part of that plan, and one of my first and most important tasks, if confirmed, will be to manage the effective use of those funds.”

**U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood
January 21, 2009**

The Economic Recovery Act and the TIGER Team. Less than one month after taking the oath of office, President Obama signed the landmark American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Before the bill was passed, however, Secretary LaHood had already created a team within the Department of Transportation to coordinate the department’s role in the recovery program. The team, known as the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) team, was created to ensure that economic recovery funding is rapidly made available for transportation infrastructure projects and that project spending is monitored and transparent.

- Through ARRA, the Department of Transportation and its TIGER team are making \$48.1 billion available for highway, road, transit, bridge and airport construction and repairs nationwide. Of that, \$32.1 billion already has been obligated to fund more than 11,300 approved projects in 53 U.S. States and Territories.
- Currently, more than 7,600 transportation projects are underway across the country.
- The Federal Aviation Administration has allocated \$1.2 billion in ARRA funding to airports throughout the country, with more than 355 projects currently underway or completed.
- The Federal Highway Administration has obligated \$21.8 billion – or 80 percent of its total funds – to date for more than 10,000 projects.
- With an initial \$8 billion investment from the Obama Administration, the department laid the groundwork for development of a transformational high-speed passenger rail program that will connect some of our most vital metropolitan regions in new ways and open the door to new economic opportunities sustained by world-class public transportation services once spending starts in the near future.

- The DOT received nearly 1,400 applications from all 50 states, territories and the District of Columbia for its \$1.5 billion TIGER Discretionary Grants Program. In January – one month earlier than mandated – the DOT will award TIGER Grants on a competitive basis to projects that have a significant impact on the nation, a region or metropolitan area, in particular, those located in economically-distressed areas and with strong job-creation potential.
- The Federal Transit Administration has awarded 690 grants to transit agencies for a total obligation to date of \$7.2 billion in ARRA funds.
- The Federal Railroad Administration has now approved \$1.2 billion worth of Amtrak projects under the ARRA capital grant program. Of those, more than 73 projects are currently underway.
- The Federal Railroad Administration received 259 grant applications for the High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail program, seeking more than \$57 billion in funds. FRA plans to make final selections for the \$8 billion program this winter.
- The Maritime Administration has announced 70 grants worth \$98 million to improve small shipyards throughout the United States. All of these projects are currently underway.
- On August 28, the DOT launched the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Bonding Assistance Program, which will provide \$20 million in subsidies to help small minority-owned firms secure loans and grow their business.

Car Allowance Rebate System. The Car Allowance Rebate System (CARS) was the most successful short-term economic stimulus initiative in the department’s history. Within a four-month period, the DOT processed more than \$2.8 billion in voucher payments for more than 21,000 automobile dealers who sold nearly 700,000 new, more fuel-efficient vehicles, and took an equal number of gas-guzzling clunkers off the road.

PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY

“The most compelling reason for infrastructure investment is the lasting economic and social benefit it brings over decades and even generations. Indeed, much of our economic success in recent decades has been built on the wise infrastructure investments made by our predecessors ... [O]ur transportation system and the development it enables must be sustainable. We must acknowledge the new reality of climate change. This has implications for all areas; investments in intercity rail and mass transit, as called for in the economic recovery and reinvestment plan, are part of the equation, but only part. Sustainability must be a principle reflected in all our infrastructure investments, from highways and transit to aviation and ports. President-Elect Obama is committed to this principle and so am I.”

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood
January 21, 2009

Improving Automobile Fuel Efficiency and Reducing Carbon Emissions. President Obama began the policy phase of his Administration with a landmark transportation and environmental announcement, setting the bar for improved automobile fuel economy. In concert with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the department proposed aggressive new fuel economy and greenhouse gas emission standards for light-duty cars and trucks that will substantially reduce the nation’s dependence on oil and will improve air quality.

National Rail Plan. The department is in the process of creating the first ever National Rail Plan to address the comprehensive rail needs of the nation. The plan will integrate long-term strategies for the growth of the country’s passenger and freight rail systems. It will focus on improving safety, fostering livable communities, increasing the economic competitiveness of the United States, and promoting sustainable transportation.

TIFIA Loans Spur Infrastructure Investment. Through the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) program, the Department of Transportation partnered with state transportation agencies to assist in the delivery of critical transportation projects - many involving the application of innovative financing strategies being deployed for the first time in the United States. More than \$1 billion in TIFIA loans were provided to support the following projects:

- Broward County, Florida received a \$603 million loan to build new express lanes on I-595 to give drivers more choices for a better commute. This project included a financial arrangement – known as “availability payments” that allows Florida DOT to collect the tolls on the new lanes and pay back the private developer based on certain performance standards. This was the first such arrangement in the country—and essentially a new model to structure a transportation loan.

- The Port of Miami Tunnel project received a \$341 million loan to build a vital transportation link that will improve safety and reduce traffic congestion in the Miami area. This was only the second availability payment agreement in the United States.
- The Triangle Expressway in North Carolina received a \$386 million loan to build brand new sections of highway serving Research Triangle Park. This TIFIA loan made history in North Carolina because it financed the first toll road in the state. The Triangle Expressway was also the first toll road developed by the Turnpike Authority.

Suisun Bay, California. The Department of Transportation and its Maritime Administration took critical steps to mitigate the environmental threat posed by the storage of obsolete ships in Suisun Bay, California, working with Congressional, state, and local authorities to develop a responsible and efficient plan to dispose of the obsolete ships. The first two ships to leave Suisun Bay in more than two years departed in early December.

LIVABILITY

“Third is a strong focus on people and the communities where they live and work. This can take many forms. In aviation, it means a commitment to the end user of our aviation system: the passenger. An aviation system that focuses on the safety, convenience and confidence of the traveling public will be a successful system. In our surface transportation programs, it implies a commitment to the principles that some refer to as livability; that is, investing in a way that recognizes the unique character of each community. The era of one-size-fits-all transportation projects must give way to one where preserving and enhancing unique community characteristics, be they rural or urban, is a primary mission of our work rather than an afterthought.”

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DOT- EPA-HUD Interagency Partnership on Sustainable Communities. In June, Secretary LaHood joined forces with U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Shaun Donovan and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa P. Jackson to create an interagency Partnership for Sustainable Communities. The partnership’s goal is to help improve access to affordable housing, more transportation options, and lower transportation costs while protecting the environment in communities nationwide.

TIGER Discretionary Grants to Promote Livability. The department is taking steps to address livability with a \$1.5 billion discretionary transportation grant program under the Recovery Act. The Department is looking for projects that promote greater mobility, a cleaner environment with reduced greenhouse gas emissions and more livable communities.

Through the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are providing assistance to DOT in evaluating the TIGER grant applications. HUD and EPA are lending their expertise on affordable housing, economic development and environmental issues to identify the applications that best meet criteria on livability.

Also, \$600 million has been allocated to DOT for a second round of TIGER grants in the conference report of the FY10 THUD bill, and \$30 million of those funds can be used for planning and capacity building to generate and fund higher quality projects that, among other things, improve livability.

Streetcars, Buses and Bus Facilities. The department announced the availability of \$280 million in Livability Initiative grants for urban circulator projects such as streetcars, buses, and bus facilities.

DOT-HUD-EPA Sustainable Communities Grants. DOT and EPA are working with HUD to select projects to share in \$100 million in sustainable communities planning grants. DOT and HUD are also partnering with EPA in their smart growth technical assistance program, which helps communities implement livability approaches.

DOT-HUD-EPA Encourage Transit Oriented Development. FTA and HUD are working together to address barriers to transit oriented development at the local and regional level. Jointly, FTA and HUD have developed an action guide to help planners implement mixed-income transit oriented development and regional transit corridor planning. Also, FTA has been working with the Center for Transit Oriented Development and HUD to develop an online database which includes information on land available for development near over 4,000 existing and planned rail/transit stations.

DOT Consumer Rule Limits Airline Tarmac Delays, Provides Other Passenger Protections. In December, the Department responded to a series of lengthy tarmac delays and consumer complaints with a new rule to strengthen rights and ensure fair treatment for airline passengers. The rule prohibits U.S. airlines operating domestic flights from permitting an aircraft to remain on the tarmac for more than three hours without deplaning passengers and requires carriers to provide adequate food and potable drinking water within two hours of a tarmac delay.