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Tri-State Releases New Analysis of State by State Transportation Investment Priorities

Analysis finds need for more uniformity, transparency and accountability in state reporting of transportation spending

An unprecedented analysis and report, "Tracking State Transportation Dollars," conducted by Tri-State Transportation Campaign, examines state-level transportation spending in each of the 50 states. After obtaining and reviewing each state's transportation improvement program (STIP), the Campaign found that on average, states are spending 20 percent of their transportation dollars (often leveraged by state and local sources) on transit, 2 percent on bicycle/pedestrian projects, 39 percent on projects that maintain roads and bridges, and 23 percent on projects that add new capacity to roads and bridges. This project is an expansion of Tri-State's annual STIP analysis for New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

In the tri-state region, the Campaign found that Connecticut devotes 23 percent of its STIP to road and bridge expansion, while New York commits 62 percent of its STIP to transit and two percent to bicycle/pedestrian projects. Both Connecticut and New Jersey commit 27 percent of their transportation dollars to maintaining existing roads and bridges.

The Campaign's analysis examines the STIPs of all 50 states to determine short-term spending priorities and provides insight into transportation investments on a national level. The STIP is a federally mandated transportation reporting document developed by each state's department of transportation and metropolitan planning organizations. It generally covers a four year period and lists all projects expected to be funded with federal dollars over the same period. The STIP typically shows other contributions (state, local and private) put towards these projects as well. Although the STIP is a federally required reporting document, the information contained within is often indecipherable to the general public and difficult to obtain.

“Each STIP analysis is a helpful policy tool for taxpayers and legislators interested in understanding how federal transportation dollars, often leveraged by state and local funds, are being spent throughout the state,” said Veronica Vanterpool, executive director at the Campaign.

The Campaign’s report, “Tracking State Transportation Dollars,” found that:

- Transportation reporting documents are not uniform, and in many states, these documents are inaccessible and not transparent to the public;
- State departments of transportation tend to do a poor job of clearly explaining how transportation dollars are spent; and
- More transparency increases public support of transportation projects.

“Improved reporting in each state’s STIP will help the public, elected officials, and the federal government understand the kinds of transportation investments each state is making with its federal dollars,” said Renata Silberblatt, staff analyst at the Campaign and report author. “Furthermore, increased transparency can help state DOTs gain public support for their projects,” she added.

To achieve increased uniformity and transparency in state-level transportation planning, the report recommends:

- Increasing accessibility of STIPs and the creation of a state DOT contact for all STIP questions;
- Requiring uniform information and project categories in all STIPs;
- Including descriptions and costs of project components in STIPs; and
- Developing performance metrics for STIP projects.

An interactive website, trackstatedollars.org, was also launched and includes state fact sheets that outline each state’s transportation spending. The fact sheets are available as one-page downloadable PDFs.

The Campaign has been tracking planned transportation spending in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut since examining Connecticut’s 2000 STIP. Closely examining how each state plans to spend its federal, state and local transportation dollars has informed the Campaign’s advocacy work and helped the Campaign win numerous policy and program goals, including:

- The passage of New York’s complete streets law;
- The restoration of New Jersey’s Transit Village program; and
- The passage of Connecticut’s complete streets law.

“We hope that the information provided in this report and in state-level analysis will help people across the country encourage their state DOTs to make more sustainable and equitable transportation decisions,” said Silberblatt. According to Silberblatt, this is particularly true because MAP-21, the transportation law signed by President Obama on

July 6th, gives state DOTs more flexibility in allocating federal transportation dollars. “Given this flexibility, it is even more important for the public to pay close attention to how their state DOTs are choosing to spend their funds,” Silberblatt noted.

The report and state fact sheets can be found on the project website, trackstatedollars.org.

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Tri-State Transportation Campaign is a non-profit organization working toward a more balanced, transit-friendly and equitable transportation system in Connecticut, New York and New Jersey.