



## Policy Resolution 2018-06

### Transportation Infrastructure in the Western United States

#### A. BACKGROUND

1. The American West encompasses a huge land mass representing 2.4 million square miles or over two-thirds of the entire country. Over 116 million people live in these states and they reside in large, densely populated cities, smaller cities and towns and in rural areas.
2. Perhaps more than any other region, terrain and landownership patterns in the West underscore the purpose and vital need for a federal role in surface transportation. Western states are responsible for vast expanses of national highways and interstates that often do not correlate with population centers but serve as critical national freight and transportation routes for the nation.
3. Western states ports are national assets, moving needed parts and retail goods into the country, while also providing the gateway for our nation's exports. Although they benefit the entire country, the financial burden of developing, expanding and maintaining them to meet the demands of growing trade is almost entirely borne at the state and local level.
4. Jobs, the economy and quality of life in the West depend on high quality transportation infrastructure that efficiently, effectively and safely moves goods and people. Western transportation infrastructure is part of a national network that serves national interests. Among other things, transportation infrastructure in the West: moves agricultural and natural resource products from source to national and world markets; carries goods from western ports on western highways and railroad track to eastern and southern cities; and enables travelers to visit the great National Parks and other destinations in the West.
5. The transportation and transit needs in the West differ significantly from our eastern counterparts. Western states are building new capacity to keep up with growth, including new interstates, new multimodal systems including high-speed passenger rail and transit systems and increased capacity on existing infrastructure.
6. The infrastructure in the region is under strain from both increased movement of goods and people and from underinvestment in repair and new infrastructure needed to keep pace with this growth and change.
7. The vast stretches of highways and railroad track that connect the West to the nation do not have the population densities seen in the eastern United States.
8. Raising private funds to carry forward infrastructure projects in the rural West will be extremely challenging. The low traffic volumes in rural states will not support tolls, even if one wanted to impose them. Projects in rural areas are unlikely to generate revenues that will attract investors to finance those projects, even if the revenues are supplemented by tax credits.

**B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT**

1. Western Governors believe there is a strong federal role, in partnership with the states, for the continued investment in our surface transportation network – particularly on federal routes and in multimodal transportation networks throughout the West that are critical to interstate commerce and a growing economy. These routes and networks traverse hundreds of miles without traffic densities sufficient to either make public-private partnerships feasible or allow state and local governments to raise capital beyond the historic cost share.
2. Western Governors believe the current project decision-making role of state and local governments in investment decisions should continue. Western Governors desire additional flexibility to determine how and where to deploy investment in order to maximize the use of scarce resources.
3. Western Governors believe regulation accompanying Federal Transportation programs should be reduced by expediting project delivery and streamlining the environmental review process without diminishing environmental standards or safeguards.
4. Western Governors believe that a viable, long-term funding mechanism is critical to the maintenance and expansion of our surface transportation network and encourage Congress to work together to identify a workable solution that adequately funds the unique needs of the West.
5. Western Governors believe in enhancing the ability to leverage scarce resources by supplementing traditional base funding by creating and enhancing financing mechanisms and tools that are appropriate for all areas of the United States, including those with low traffic densities where tolling and public private partnerships are not feasible.
6. Western Governors believe using the historic formula-based approach for the distribution of funds would ensure that both rural and urban states participate in any infrastructure initiative and it would deliver the benefits of an infrastructure initiative to the public promptly.
7. Western Governors believe the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) and the programs it supports are critically important to success in efforts to maintain and improve America's surface transportation infrastructure. Currently, the HTF will not be able to support even current Federal surface transportation program levels and will not meet the needs of the country that will grow as the economy grows. Congress must provide a long-term solution to ensure HTF solvency and provide for increased, sustainable federal transportation investment through the HTF.
8. Western Governors strongly encourage western states port operators and their labor unions to work together to avoid future work slowdowns by resolving labor issues well before contracts are set to expire. In recent years protracted disagreement in bargaining between parties has had an adverse impact on the American economy that should not be repeated.
9. Western Governors believe modern ports infrastructure is essential to strong national and western economy and urge Congress to fully fund the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund and

to reform the Harbor Maintenance Tax to ensure western ports remain competitive. Furthermore, Western Governors believe the Federal government must work collaboratively with states, along with ports, local governments and key private sector transportation providers like the railroads, to ensure the necessary public and private investments to move imports and exports efficiently through the intermodal system.

**C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE**

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with Congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

*Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a bi-annual basis. Please consult [www.westgov.org/policies](http://www.westgov.org/policies) for the most current copy of a resolution and a list of all current WGA policy resolutions.*