



Smart Growth America

Improving lives by improving communities

Contextualizing the Federal Transportation Policy and Funding Paradigm

Vermont Senate Committee on Transportation (31 January 2025)



Presenter



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Smart Growth America

Improving lives by improving communities



**Transportation
for America**



National Complete
Streets Coalition



State
**Smart Transportation
Initiative**

LOCUS
Responsible Real Estate
Developers & Investors

FBCI Form-Based
Codes Institute

“We envision a country where no matter where you live, or who you are, you can enjoy living in a place that is healthy, prosperous, and resilient.”



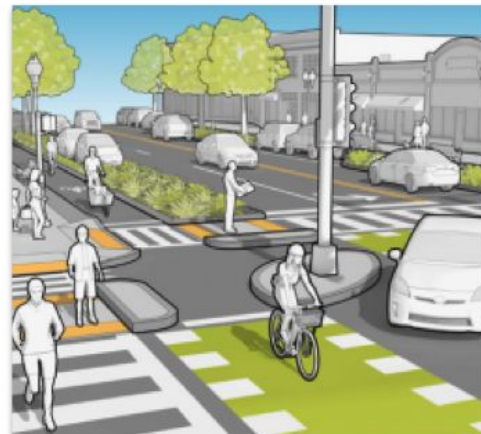
What We Do



Technical Assistance



Advocacy



Thought Leadership

Guiding principles for transportation investment

The time has come to elevate the national conversation about transportation beyond the cost—we need a vision for what we expect to accomplish.

America's federal transportation program does not address basic needs, and more money alone poured into this broken federal program will not suffice. Billions of dollars are spent without clear desired outcomes, and there is far too little accountability for accomplishing anything measurable and tangible.

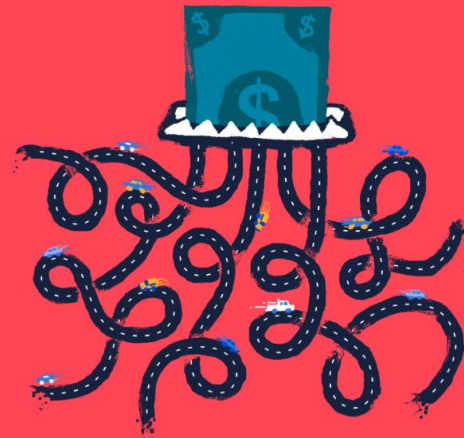
We need to reform the 70-year-old federal program to reflect today's needs and ensure a focus on fixing our existing system first, on improving safety, and on accountability.

Learn more: t4america.org/platform

PRINCIPLE #2

Fix it first

If your house has a leaky roof, you fix that before remodeling your kitchen. The federal transportation program should do the same and prioritize existing maintenance needs ahead of building new things which require decades of additional repair costs.



PRINCIPLE #1

Design for safety over speed

Any serious effort to reduce deaths on our streets and roads requires slower speeds. Federal funding should require approaches and street designs that put safety first.



PRINCIPLE #3

Invest in the rest

For 60 years we've invested hundreds of billions of dollars in highways. Now it's time to **invest in the rest** to create a complete transportation network so more Americans can safely travel by foot, bike, bus, or train.





Agenda

- Ongoing Transportation Challenges
 - Nationally
 - Vermont
- Influencing the Status Quo
- Reframing DOT Values Structure
- Recommended Actions



Who are we designing for?





Vehicles, or People?

No two communities are the same



Ongoing Transportation Challenges





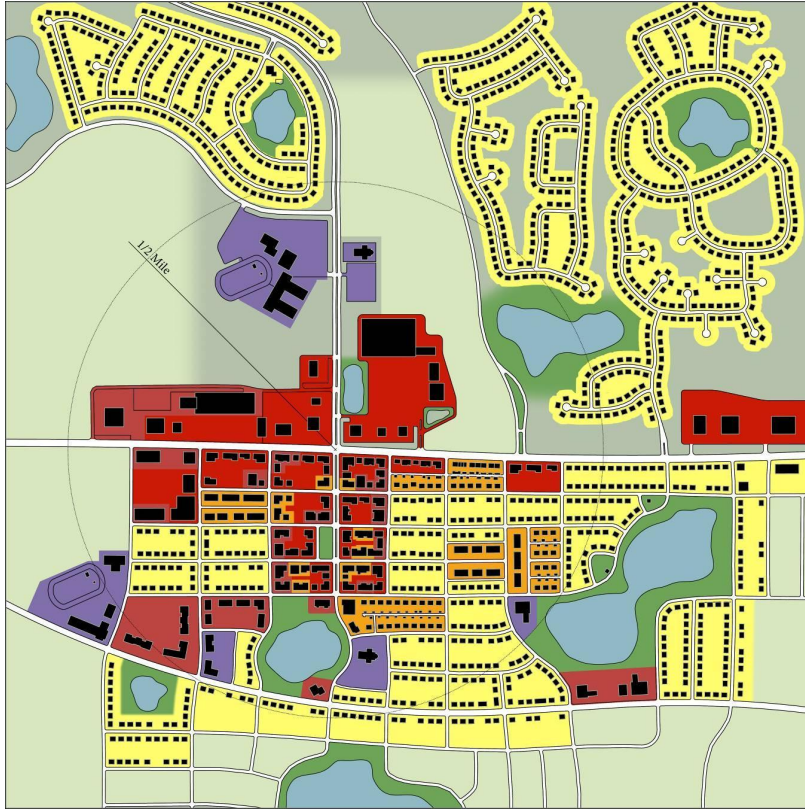
Ongoing Transportation Challenges

- Safety
- State of Good Repair
- Reliability
- Lack of Mobility Choice
- Accessibility
- Climate Change & Resiliency
- Aging and Challenged Workforce





Ongoing Transportation Challenges



Development
patterns &
transportation
context



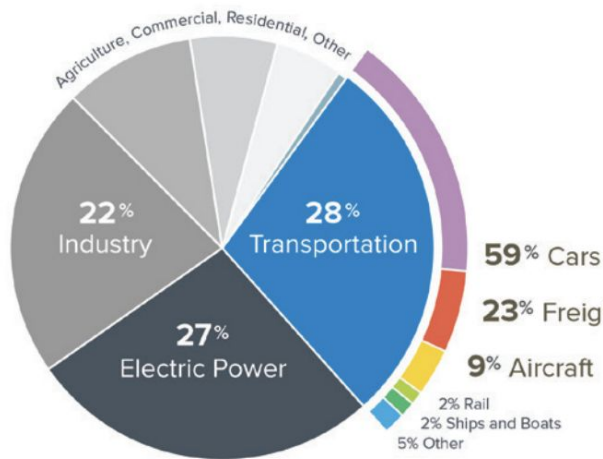
Ongoing Transportation Challenges



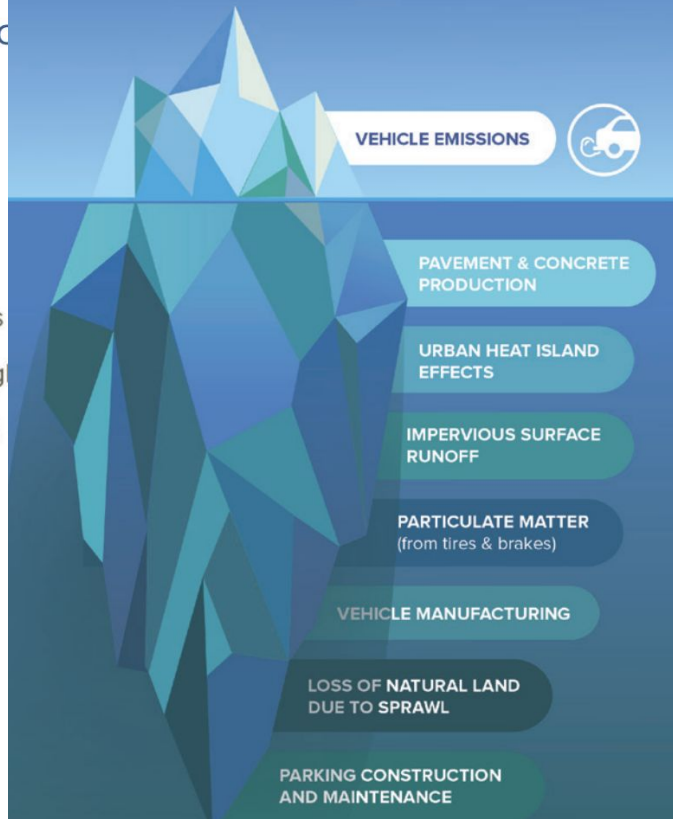


Climate in Transportation

2018 U.S. GHG EMISSIONS BY SECTOR & SOURCE



THE HIDDEN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF DRIVING



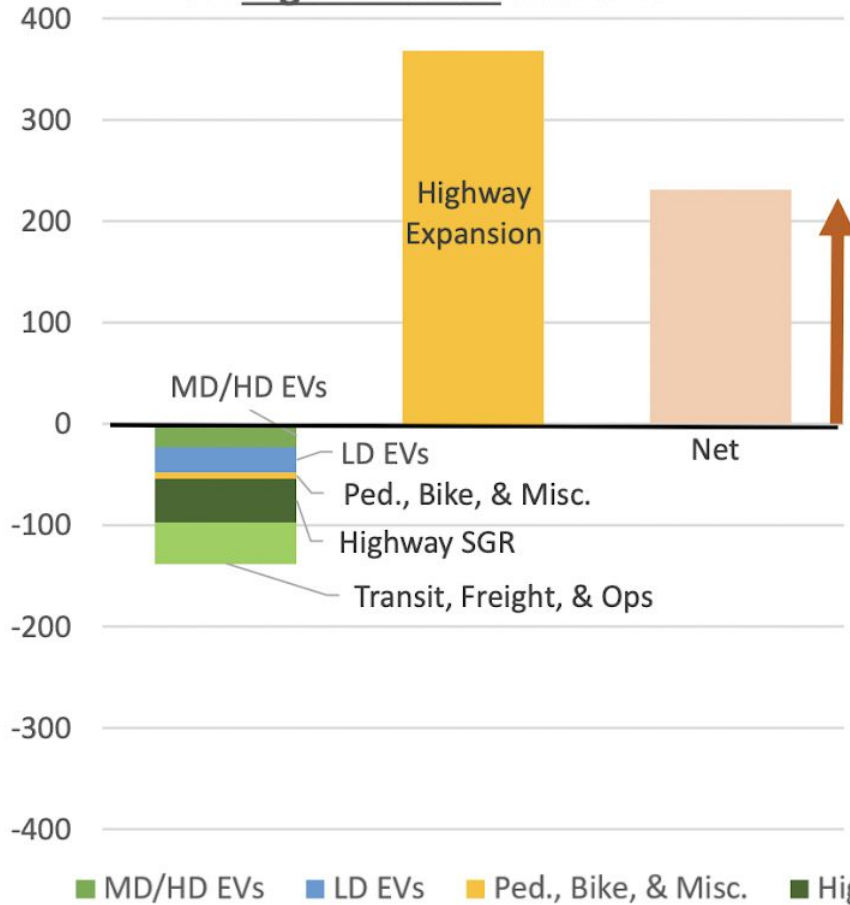
1990-2017

Even as our vehicles have gotten far **more efficient**, **emissions have risen**.

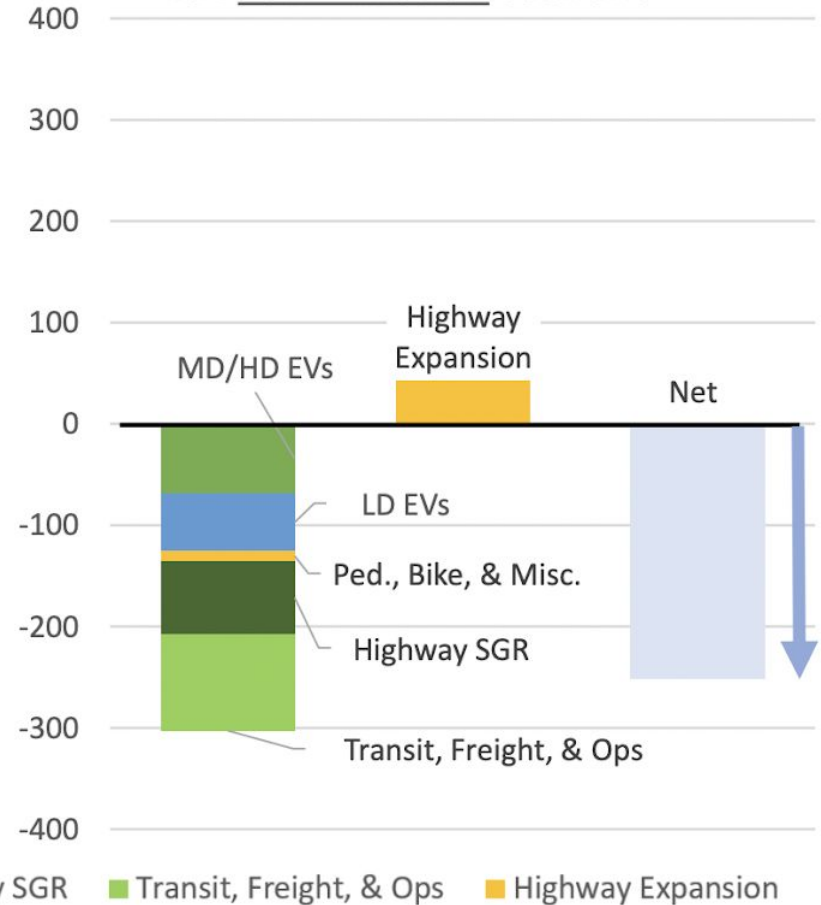
Why? A **50% increase in driving** overwhelmed all of those improvements in fuel efficiency.

50%
VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED

IIJA High-Emission Scenario



IIJA Low-Emission Scenario





Ongoing Transportation Challenges - Vermont Context

- Funding Challenges
- Inter-state growth pressures and externalities
- Limited mobility choice
- Lack of protections for vulnerable road users
- Development pressures and constraints

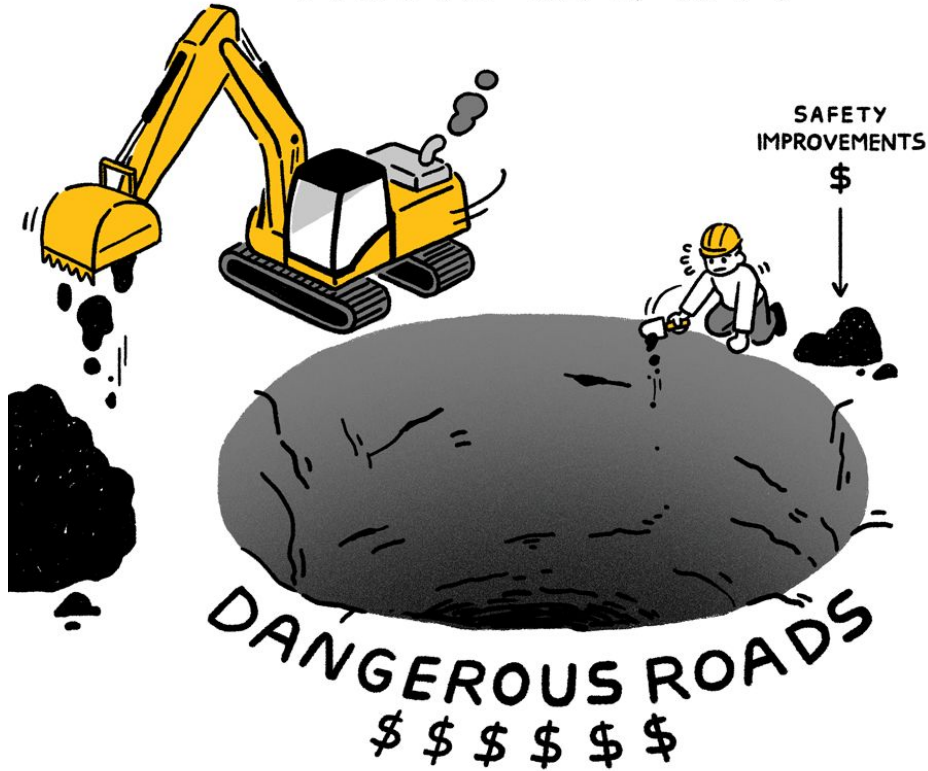


Influencing the Status Quo



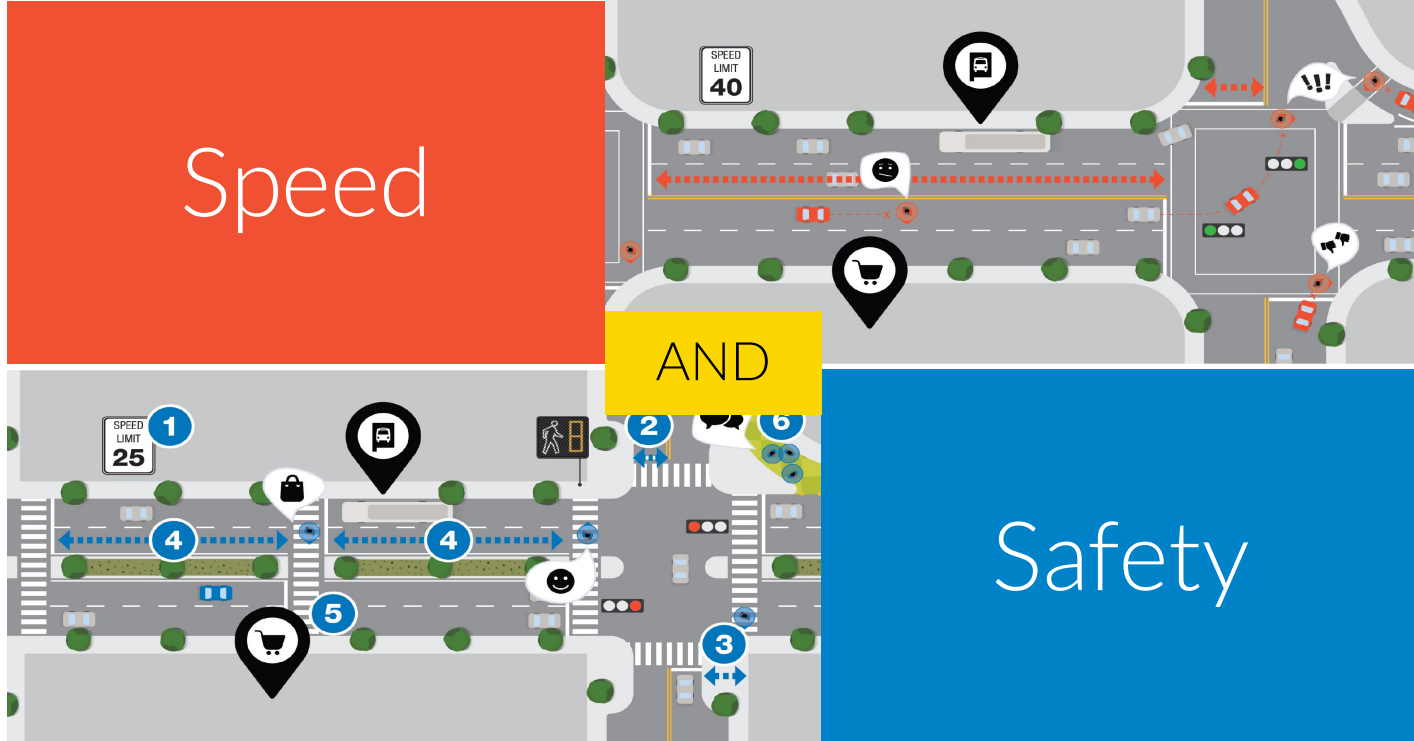
We design for 9-to-5 downtown work trips.

U.S. APPROACH TO ROAD SAFETY





It's Impossible to prioritize both...

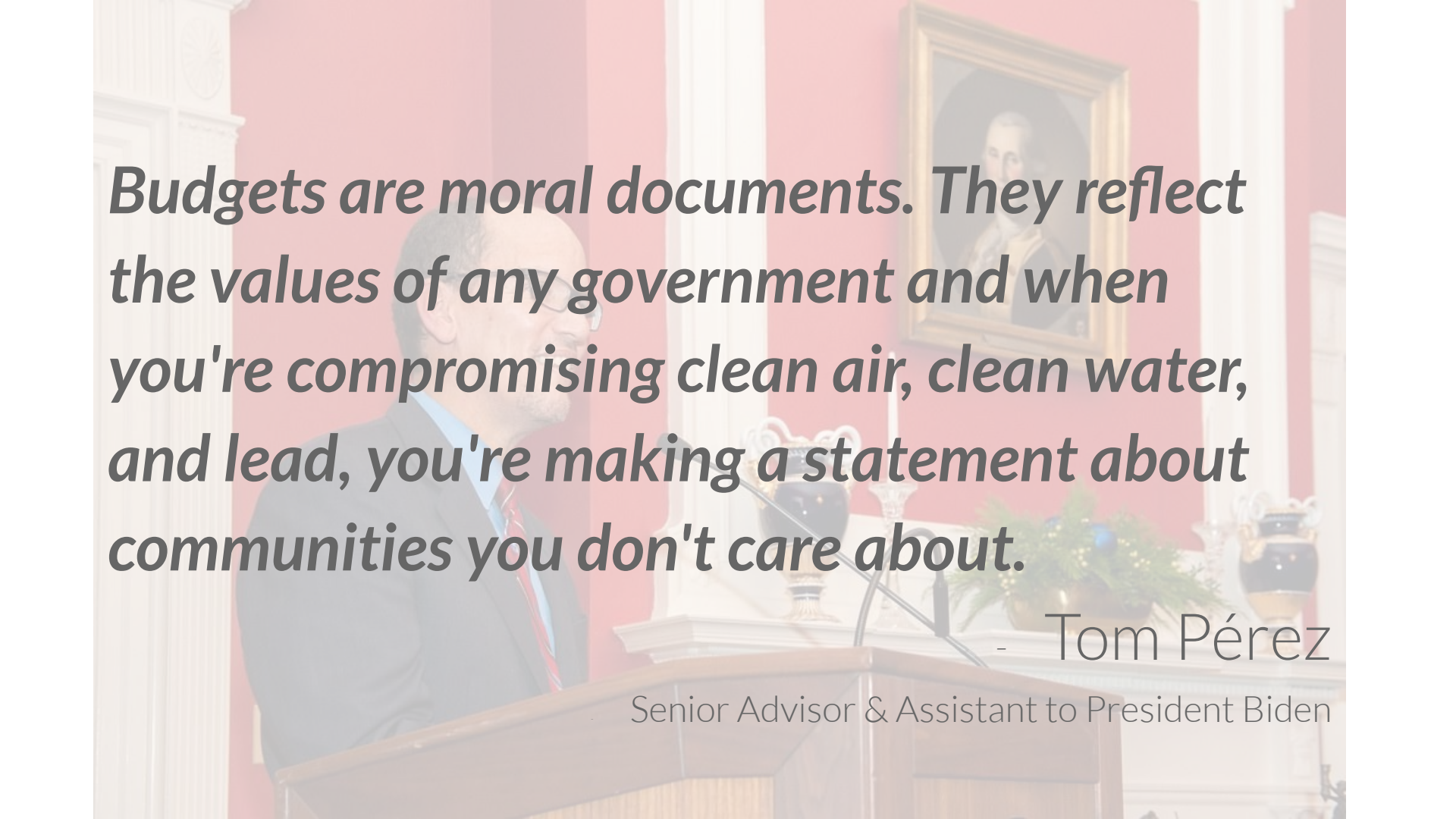




Implications from Transportation Decision Making



Siloed approach to the built environment perpetuates livability challenges

A photograph of Tom Pérez, a man with glasses wearing a dark suit, light blue shirt, and red tie, speaking at a wooden podium. The background is a red wall with a framed portrait of a man in a suit. There are decorative items on the podium, including a vase with greenery and blue ornaments, and a small blue vase. The text is overlaid on the image in a bold, italicized, dark grey font.

Budgets are moral documents. They reflect the values of any government and when you're compromising clean air, clean water, and lead, you're making a statement about communities you don't care about.

- Tom Pérez

Senior Advisor & Assistant to President Biden

THE 80-20 SPLIT FOR TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

HIGHWAYS

TRANSIT



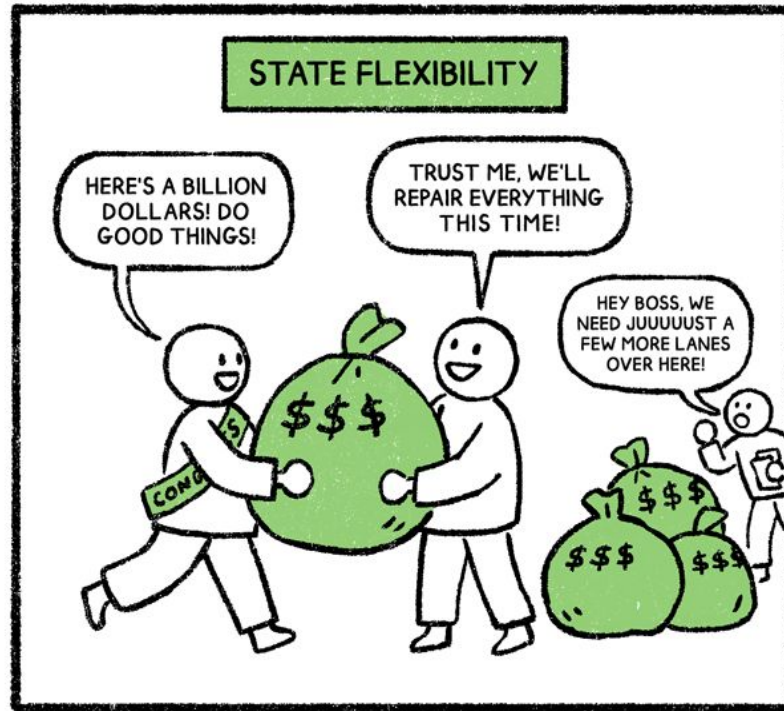
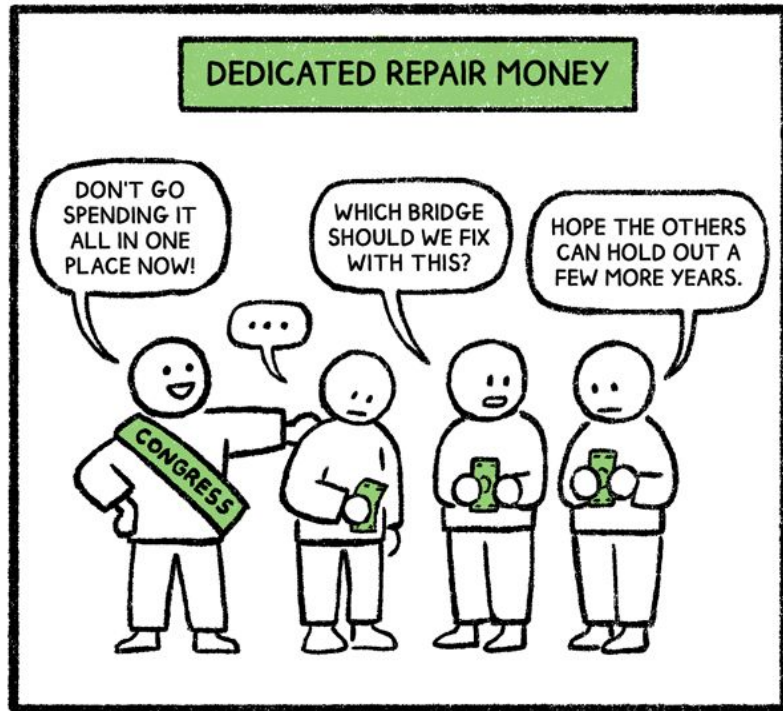
80 PERCENT

20 PERCENT



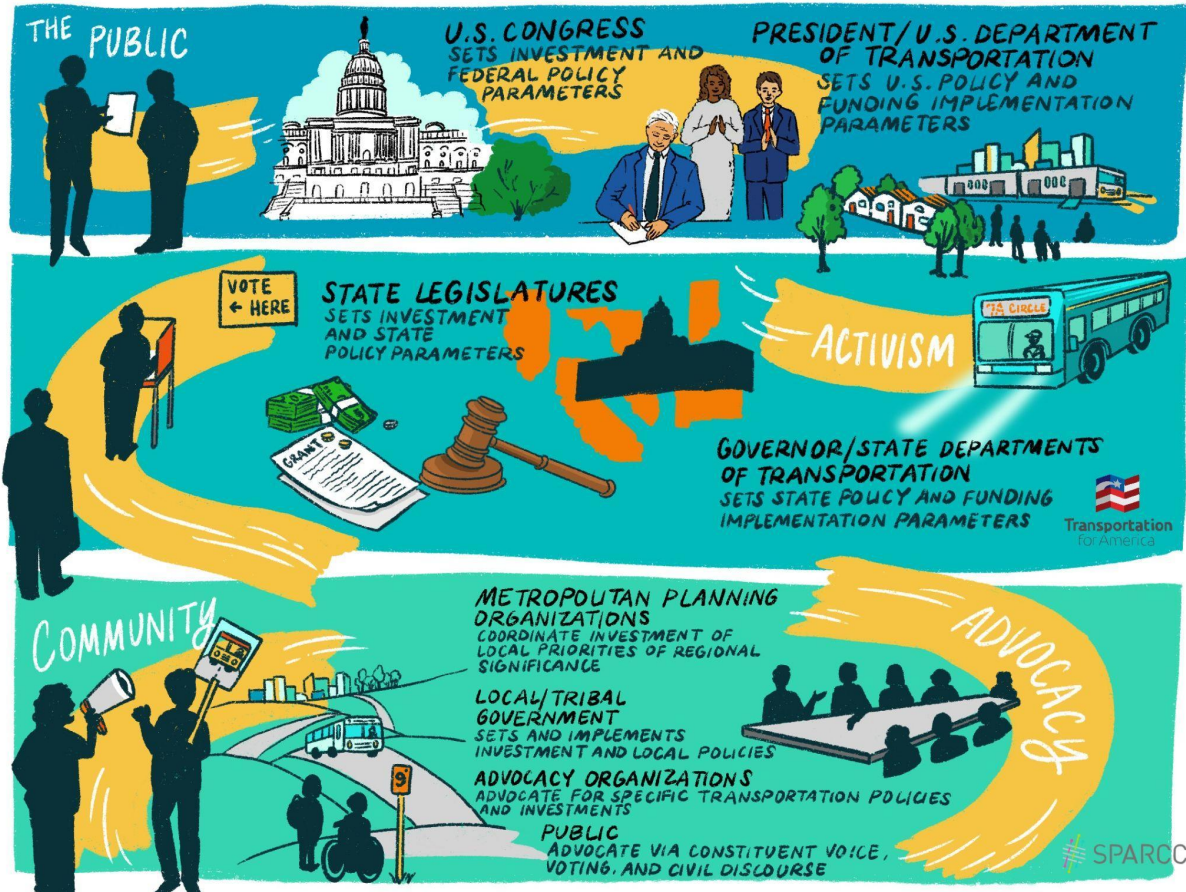
More Money, More Problems

MONEY FOR REPAIRS





Policy Levers





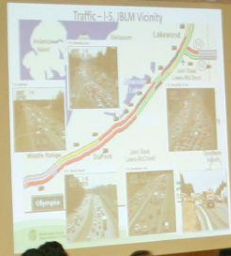
State Legislative Oversight

- Accounting for spent funding
- Discussions with executive on funding / policy adherence
- Transparency / accountability for executive actions
- Review policy/funding intent versus outcomes



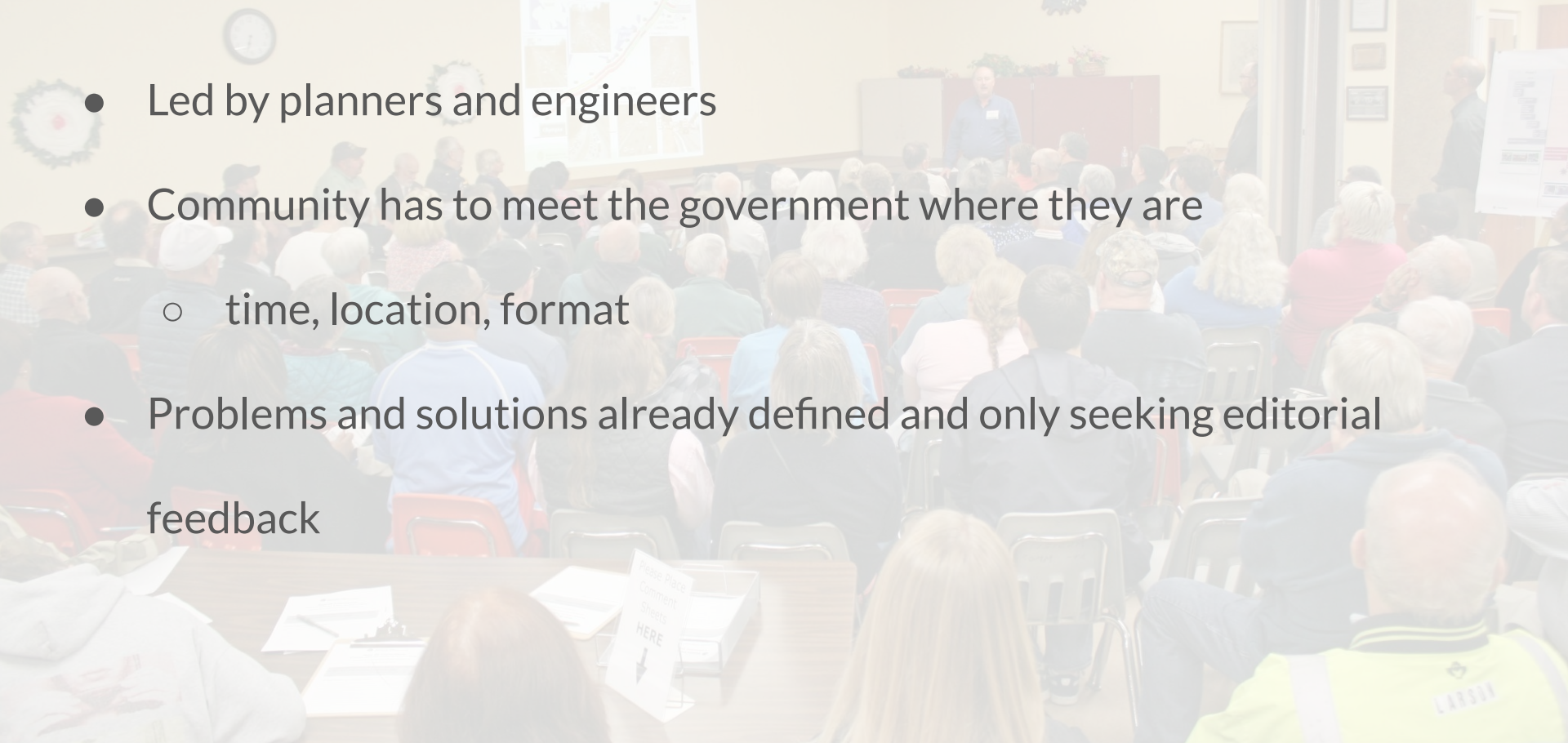
Reframing DOT Values

MCKINNON HALL



Community Engagement State of the Practice

- Led by planners and engineers
- Community has to meet the government where they are
 - time, location, format
- Problems and solutions already defined and only seeking editorial feedback





*Communities know what they want to do but...
they may not know how to do it*



13035

UTA 

CLEAN AIR
NATURAL GAS BUS

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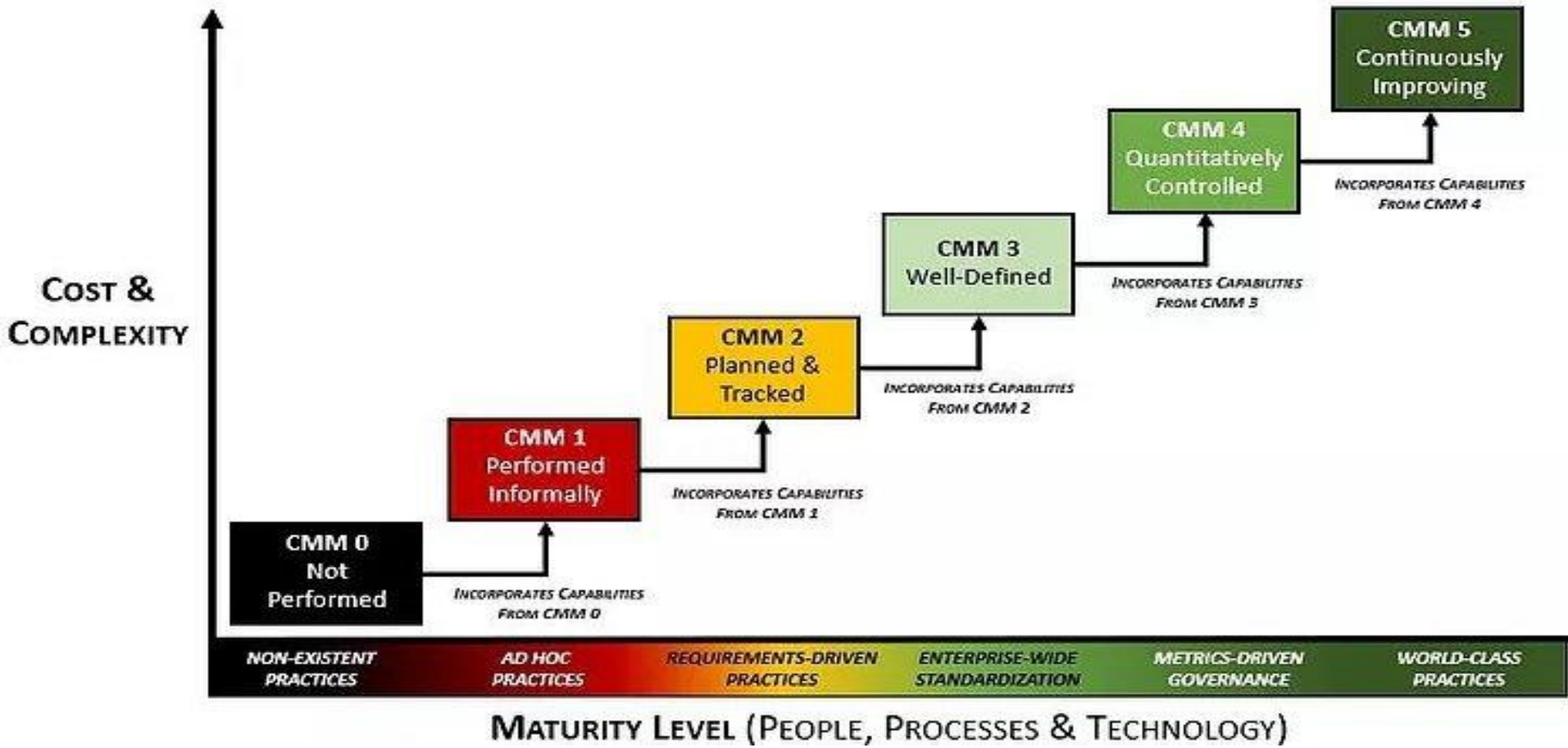


Bridging the Gap in Community Engagement

- Access to information
- Government transparency
- Reform community engagement practices
 - Meet folks where they are
 - Positioning government to be a community tool
 - Clear and concise asks for feedback process
 - Explore resources to improve engagement access



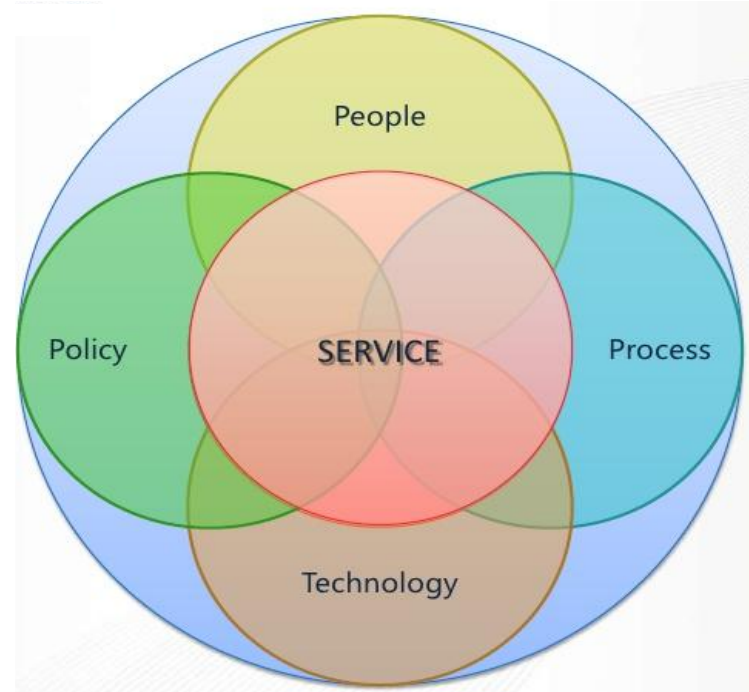
Capacity Maturity Model





Capacity Maturity of DOTs: What's Evaluated?

- People
- Process
- Policies
- Technology



Recommended Actions



Leveraging Transportation Funding: Maintenance / People First

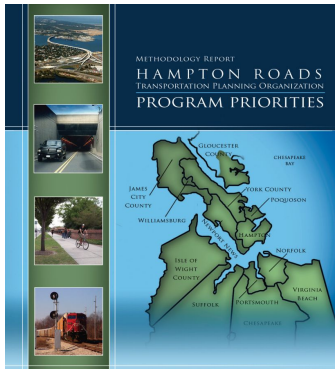


The Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017





Leveraging Transportation Funding: Project Prioritization



(2010)



[HB 2313](#)
(Funding)
(2013)

[HB 2](#)
(Process)
(2014)

Screened SMART SCALE Application

Calculation of SMART SCALE Measures

Internal and External QA/QC Review

Measure Values and Weighting Factor Weighting Project Cost

Project Scoring

Scored projects to Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) for Prioritization

SMART SCALE utilizes evaluation measures that quantify the benefits of each project for six factor areas, detailed below:

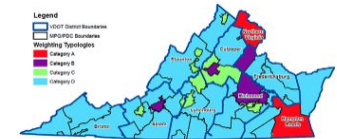
Factor areas	Measure ID	Measure Name	Measure weight
Safety	S.1	Equivalent property damage only (EPDO) of Fatal and Injury Crashes*	70 percent
	S.2	EPDO Rate of Fatal and Injury Crashes.	30 percent
Congestion mitigation	C.1	Person-Throughput	50 percent
	C.2	Person-Hours of Delay	50 percent
Accessibility	A.1	Access to jobs	60 percent
	A.2	Access to jobs for disadvantaged persons	20 percent
Environmental quality	A.3	Access to multimodal choices	20 percent
	E.1	Air quality and environmental effect	100 percent
Economic development	E.2	Impact to natural and cultural resources	0 percent - Subtract up to 5 points
	ED.1	Project support for economic development	60 percent
Land use	ED.2	Intermodal access and efficiency	20 percent
	ED.3	Travel time reliability	20 percent
Land use	L.1	Transportation efficient land use	50 percent
	L.2	Increase in transportation efficient land use	50 percent

*100 Percent for transit and Transportation Demand Management projects

Four area weighting typologies were established based on an analysis of transportation, land use, demographic indicators, and public input to facilitate evaluation of each project's benefit on a scale relative to the needs of that region as compared across the commonwealth. The weighting typologies are below.

A scoring evaluation team begins collecting additional data required for evaluating each of the six factor areas used for project evaluation: 1) Safety, 2) Congestion, 3) Accessibility, 4) Land Use, 5) Economic Development and 6) Environment.

After data has been collected to evaluate each factor, values are calculated and weighted according to the area type where the project is located.



Factor totals are then weighted and summed, and the final score is determined by dividing the benefit score by the SMART SCALE cost. Projects are then ranked and provided to the CTB for funding consideration.

To learn more about the VITrans needs in your area, [click here](#).

Factor	Congestion Mitigation	Economic Development	Accessibility	Safety	Environmental quality	Land Use
Category A	45 percent	5 percent	15 percent	5 percent	10 percent	20 percent
Category B	15 percent	20 percent	20 percent	20 percent	10 percent	15 percent
Category C	15 percent	25 percent	15 percent	25 percent	10 percent	10 percent
Category D	10 percent	30 percent	10 percent	30 percent	10 percent	10 percent

<https://www.smartscale.org/>

<https://www.hrtpo.org/page/project-prioritization/>





Recommended Legislative Priorities

- Maintenance First Policy
 - State of Repair targets akin to California's [SB1 of 2017](#)
 - Funding advancing maintenance also advancing biking/walking/transit.
- Refinement of a Transportation Project Prioritization Policy reflecting State values (akin to VA's SMARTSCALE or MN's [Transportation Climate Law](#))
 - Mobility Choice
 - People First Mobility
- Strengthening Act 34 of 2011 (VT Complete Streets Policy)
 - Implementation requirement akin to Washington State 2022 [state code amendment](#)
 - Allow for quick build solution and local context in road design
- Policy development that encourages multimodal transportation oriented development
 - Removing barriers to multi-family dwellings akin to MA's [MBTA Communities Act](#)
 - Encouraging land uses that bolsters economic and housing growth alongside enhanced mobility choice.

Resources

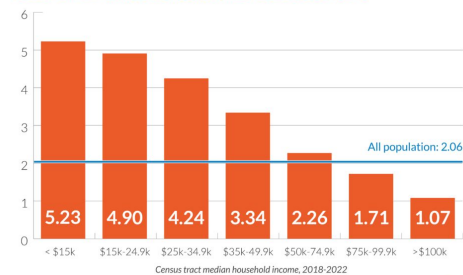
Dangerous by Design



- Drastic rise in roadway injuries and fatalities from walking and biking since 2010.
 - Design that prioritizes speed over safety
- Income, race, and age are significant predictors of current exposure to roadway safety risk, with low-income, people of color, especially above 50 years being the most vulnerable.
- Significant omission in roadway design and data is accounting for all people, regardless of physical, visual, hearing, or cognitive ability.

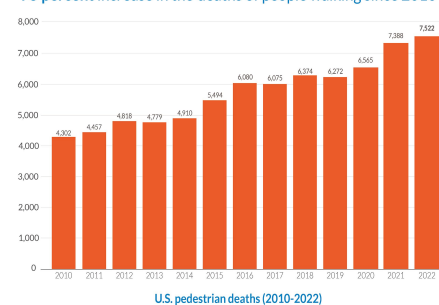
Lower-income areas have far higher rates of pedestrian deaths

Pedestrian fatalities per 100,000 people by census tract income



Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (2024) Fatality Analysis Reporting System

75 percent increase in the deaths of people walking since 2010



U.S. pedestrian deaths (2010-2022)

Smart Growth America



Community Connectors



This Community Connectors portal is our evolving tool for explaining:

- 1) Who is involved,
- 2) How the process unfolds, and
- 3) What DOTs really mean when they say, and then sharing
- 4) Real world stories from advocates—both successes and looming challenges.

Ever growing resource, both in T4A content and connecting to partner content.

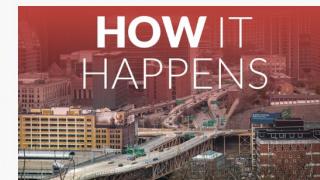
<https://t4america.org/community-connectors/>



Explaining the actors

Who has control over the hundreds of billions in federal and state transportation dollars for transportation projects? Who are the entities involved in spending this money? Who are the agencies involved in making the decisions? Start here to find out more about the people you need to know: **who is involved.**

- State DOTs
- USDOT
- Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs)



Demystifying the process

How does transportation money get spent? Where does the money come from? What things *can* federal transportation money be spent on? Start here to find out more about the process: **how it happens.**

- How are projects chosen for funding? (Programming)
- A plethora of plans: what do they all mean? (Planning)
- The limits of environmental laws (like NEPA) to protect communities



Decoding common terms

Transportation engineers, planners, and decision makers often bury advocates in a sea of jargon and acronyms, accompanied by an explicit message that you *can't* possibly understand things well enough to suggest a different path. Start here to learn about the obscure, complex measures and models that have incredible influence over what gets built and where: **things DOTs say.**

- "We have to preserve level of service (LOS)"
- "Widening this road is guaranteed to improve traffic"
- "Sorry, our street design standards don't allow that"
- "The transportation models tells us that we have to..."
- "This project will definitely save people time"
- "We can't do that, we'd get sued!"



Advocate stories

"Community Connectors" all across the country are **fighting divisive, destructive, and unaffordable freeway expansions**, advancing projects to remove old highways, making wide, dangerous arterial roads a little safer for people to cross, or just improving basic infrastructure people depend on each day. These battles are won and lost—often on the same project. **Read a growing list of profiles** our team is producing about these stories.

Stories of success

- Greenville, SC: Out with the cars, in with the people
- Gretna, LA: Tracking a downtown divide
- Milwaukee, WI: The long fight for connectivity

Alternatives to the Gas Tax: A Framework

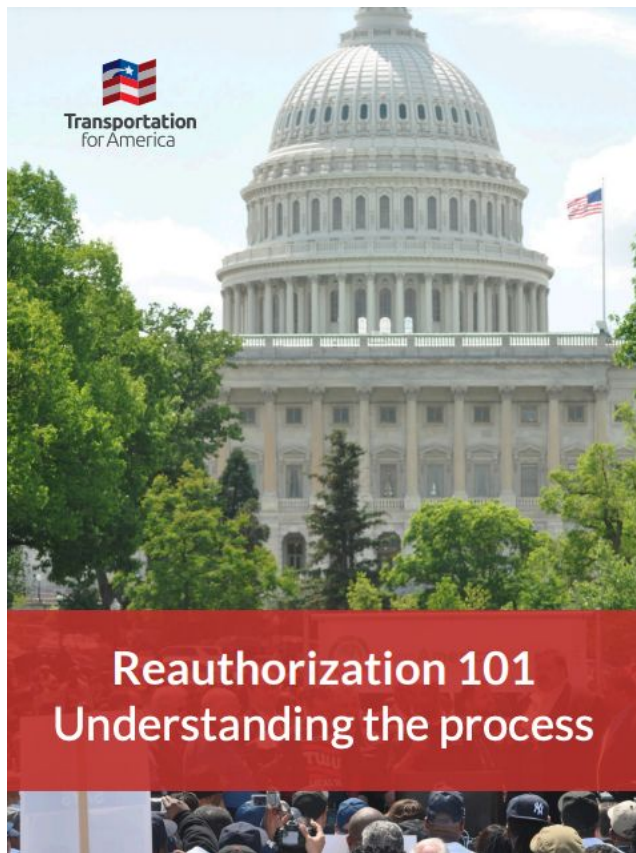
1. Revenue stability
2. Incentives & outcomes
3. Equity
4. Feasibility/Scalability



<https://t4america.org/2023/09/25/beyond-the-pump/>



Reauthorization 101



Surface transportation reauthorization (sometimes referred to as simply “reauthorization”) is a shorthand term for the legislative process where the federal surface transportation program is renewed—setting all policies, priorities, and funding levels for many years to come.

Our new short guide, [Reauthorization 101](https://t4america.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/T4America-Reauthorization-101-2024.pdf), explains and “dewonks” the transportation reauthorization process.

<https://t4america.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/T4America-Reauthorization-101-2024.pdf>



Divided by Design



- Case studies from DC and Atlanta on built vs unbuilt highway segments.
 - What was lost?
 - Who bore the brunt?
 - What could have been lost?
- Obstacles in current transportation program
- Recommendations to unwind inequities.
 - Measure what matters most: People and their needs
 - Quantify negative impacts
 - More perspective on traffic deaths
 - Measure transport system performance overall and in vulnerable communities
 - Repair past damage and stop repeating mistakes
 - Prioritize safety for all over speed of a few
 - Consider land use and transportation



Foot Traffic Ahead



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Places
Platform

A photograph of a busy city street with many pedestrians walking across a crosswalk. A blue bus is visible in the background. The text 'Foot Traffic Ahead' is overlaid on the image in a large, white, sans-serif font.

Foot Traffic AHEAD

- Social equity in this report is defined by three dimensions for different socioeconomic and racial groups
 - Affordability,
 - Transit access,
 - Proximity to walkability
- There is not an inherent tradeoff between walkable urban places and equitable access to walkable neighborhoods



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www.t4america.org

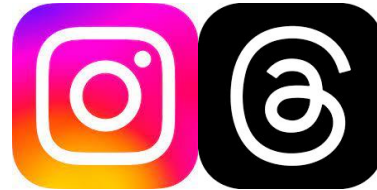
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QUESTIONS

