

The FAST Act in Washington: Let's fix the state's transportation mismatch

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act enacted late last year secures federal highway and transit programs for the next five years. State leaders now have the opportunity to decide how to divide a large share of these federal transportation funds.

The state can expect to receive almost \$3.6 billion in Federal Highway Administration funds via the FAST-Act, starting with \$687 million in 2016 and growing each year to \$750 million by 2020 – more funding than the state had previously anticipated.



Decisions on how best to use these funds are likely to start within the supplemental transportation budget developed by the Governor and state legislature in 2016.

In the past, 66% of these funds have been invested in state

highways, 34% have been used for local transportation: Including bridges, city streets, county roads, ferries, transit systems, bike and pedestrian improvements and trails.

This lopsided split between state highways and local transportation is an old policy designed when cities and counties could count on about 50% of the state fuel tax to cover the basics. Now cities and counties can only count on less than 30% of the state fuel tax.

Today 69% of all public road miles in the state are city streets and county roads. Cities and counties maintain nearly 55% of the state's 7,300 plus bridges. 58% of the bridges in the state rated "structurally deficient" are local bridges.

A new state policy is needed to match the realities of the state's transportation system with the federal funds designed to keep the whole system running. Decisions on how to divide funds within five major programs administered by the state can correct the current mismatch.

1. National Highway Performance Program - \$388 million in 2016

The largest FHWA program is focused on preserving state and local pavements and bridges on the National Highway System. In Washington state 23% of eligible roads (3,340 miles) are local, yet under the state's old policy, local roads get just 6% of these funds.

2. Surface Transportation Block Grant Program - \$177 million in 2016

This is the most flexible program, and includes broad eligibility for roadway, transit, freight and non-motorized investment. Providing more STP funding for local projects would help match the diversity of local needs and ensure transparent - merit based competition - to select the best projects.

3. Highway Safety Improvement Program - \$38 million in 2016

The HSIP requires a data-driven strategic approach to improving highway safety on all public roads and is focused on performance.

4. Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality - \$37 million in 2016

CMAQ funds can only be used for projects that produce an air quality benefit and provide congestion relief. In Washington State, they have been distributed through competitive processes via eligible entities like the PSRC.

5. National Freight Program - \$20 million in 2016

This new federal program is tailor made for Washington and is designed to improve the movement of freight on the national Highway Freight Network, which includes state and local roads and bridges, including grade crossings to speed access to ports.

Next Steps

Decisions made by the Governor and state leaders will set the policy for the next five years. They need to hear from people across the state to better understand the opportunity to correct the current mismatch. The door is open for a better local share.

