

Glossary

Allocated Funds; Allocation

A discretionary, administrative distribution of funds among the states, performed for programs that do not have statutory distribution formulas. Congress usually creates goals or standards to guide the Secretary of Transportation's distribution of the funds or earmarks some of these funds in the annual transportation appropriations act.

Apportioned Funds; Apportionment

Terms that refer to a legislatively prescribed division or assignment of funds among the States. An apportionment is based on defined formulas in the law and consists of dividing authorized funds for specific programs among the states.

Appropriations Act

Action of a legislative body that makes funds available for the expenditure with specific limitations as to amount, purpose and duration. In most cases, it permits money previously authorized to be obligated and payments made. The exception is the highway program, which operates under contract authority and appropriations specify amounts of funds that Congress will make available to liquidate prior obligations.

Attainment Area

An area considered to have air quality that meets or exceeds the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) health standards as defined in the Clean Air Act. An area may be an attainment area for one pollutant and a nonattainment area for others. Nonattainment areas are considered not to have met these standards for designated pollutants.

Authorization Act

Basic substantive legislation or that which empowers an agency to implement a particular program. It also establishes an upper limit on the amount of funds that can be appropriated for that program. The six-year highway bill is an authorization act.

Budget Authority

Empowerment by Congress that allows federal agencies to incur obligations (or commit funds) to spend money for previously "authorized" programs and projects. This empowerment is generally in the form of annual appropriations. However, for most highway program categories, it is in the form of "contract authority" (see definition below). Budget authority permits agencies to commit to spending all or part of the authorized funds. Without budget authority, federal agencies cannot obligate the government to make expenditures.

Carbon Monoxide (CO)

A colorless, odorless, tasteless gas that impedes the oxygenation of blood. CO is formed in a large part by incomplete combustion of fuel.

Conformity

Process to assess the compliance of any transportation plan, program, or project with air quality control plans. The conformity process is defined by the Clean Air Act.

Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ)

A funding category in the federal highway program, created in 1991, that directs funds to areas not in compliance with the Clean Air Act. CMAQ funds may not be used for projects that result in the construction of new capacity available to SOVs (single occupancy vehicles).

Contract Authority

A form of budget authority that permits obligations to be made in advance of appropriations. The Federal-Aid Highway Program operates mostly under contract authority rules.

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

A report that details any adverse economic, social and environmental effects of a transportation project for which federal funding is sought.

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Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

EPA is the federal source agency of air quality control regulations affecting transportation.

Equity Bonus

A funding account in SAFETEA-LU that guarantees, by 2009, that each state's share of apportionments for core highway programs is at least 92 percent of its percentage contributions to the highway account based on the latest data available at the time of the apportionment. Equity Bonus also guaranteed that each State would receive a minimum of 10 percent more funds under SAFETEA-LU than under TEA-21.

Expenditures (Outlays)

A term signifying disbursement of funds for replacement of obligations incurred. An electronic transfer of funds or a check sent to a state highway or transportation agency for voucher payment is an expenditure or outlay.

Federal-Aid Highway

Except for minor amounts of federal highway mileage under the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and military, practically all of the roads and streets in the United States are under the jurisdiction of state and local governments. The federal-aid highways are, basically, segments of state and local systems mileage eligible for federal aid. Except under special circumstances, this excludes roads that are functionally classified as rural minor collector or rural and urban local.

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

Division of the U.S. Department of Transportation that administers the federal highway program.

Fiscal Year (FY)

Since FY 1977, the yearly accounting period beginning October 1 and ending September 30 of the subsequent calendar year. Prior to FY 1977, the federal fiscal year started on July 1 and ended the following June 30.

Fiscal years are denoted by the calendar year in which they end; e.g., FY 2001 began October 1, 2000, and ended September 30, 2001.

High Occupancy Vehicles (HOVs)

This term applies generally to vehicles carrying two or more people. Freeways, expressways, and other large-volume roads may have lanes designated for HOV use.

Highway Trust Fund (HTF)

An account of the U.S. Treasury in which highway user fees collected on fuel, truck, and tire taxes are deposited. Deposits into the HTF may not be withdrawn for non-transportation purposes. A portion of the HTF is designated as the "mass transit account". The rest of the funds are commonly referred to as the "highway account".

Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA – pronounced "Ice Tea")

The first of the three "TEA" laws that authorized funding for the federal highway and transit programs in FY 1992-1997. ISTEA made significant changes in the structure of the highway program.

Interstate System

The 45,000-mile system of highways that connects the U.S. from coast to coast and border to border. The Interstate System constitutes 1 percent of total road mileage in the U.S. but carries 21 percent of all traffic. It was authorized by Congress and signed into law by President Eisenhower in 1956. Construction was financed primarily by federal fuel and other highway use taxes deposited into the Highway Trust Fund.

Limitation on Obligations (Obligations Limit)

Any action or inaction by the federal government that limits the amount of federal assistance that may be obligated during a specified time period. A limitation on obligations does not affect the scheduled apportionment or allocation of funds but controls the rate at which these funds may be used.

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Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

The organizational entity designated by law with lead responsibility for developing transportation plans and programs for urbanized areas with populations of 50,000 or more. MPOs are established by agreement of the governor, and units of general purpose local government, which together represent either 75 percent of the affected population or an urbanized area.

Minimum Guarantee (see Equity Bonus)

National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS)

Federal standards that set allowable concentrations and exposure limits for various pollutants.

National Highway System (NHS)

A 161,000-mile system of highways, including the Interstate System, designated by federal law in 1995. All but two percent of NHS routes have already been built. The NHS constitutes four percent of total road mileage in the U.S. but carries 40 percent of all traffic, including 75 percent of commercial travel, and 80 percent of tourist travel. The federal highway program reserves about \$6.5 billion annually to improve NHS routes.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Thirty-eight year old federal law that requires all federally funded public works projects, including highways and other transit systems, to be considered in terms of their potential impact on the environment. The Act requires studies to be performed on the environmental impact of a work and the results reviewed by state and federal environmental resource agencies before a project can progress past the preconstruction phase.

Obligation Authority

See “Limitations on Obligations.”

Obligations

Commitments made by federal agencies to pay out money as distinct from the actual payments, which are “outlays.” Generally, obligations are incurred after the enactment of budget authority. However, since budget authority in many highway programs is in the form of contract authority, obligations in these cases are permitted to be incurred immediately after apportionment or allocation. The obligations are for the federal share of the estimated full cost of each project at the time it is approved, regardless of when the actual payments are made or the expected time of project completion.

Outlays (Expenditures)

A term signifying disbursement of funds for replacement of obligations incurred. An electronic transfer of funds or a check sent to a state highway or transportation agency for voucher payment is an expenditure or outlay.

Ozone

Ozone is a colorless gas with a sweet odor. Ozone is not a direct emission from transportation sources. It is a secondary pollutant formed when hydrocarbons (HC) and nitrogen oxides (NO_x) combine in the presence of sunlight. Ozone is associated with smog or haze conditions.

Particulate Matter (PM), (PM-10), (PM-2.5)

Any material that exists as a solid or liquid in the atmosphere. Particulate matter may be in the form of fly ash, soot, dust, fog, fumes, etc. Particulate matter, or PM-10, is less than 10 microns in size. Fine particulates, or PM-2.5, are less than 2.5 microns in size.

Penalty

An action that does not allow a state to use the full amount of its apportioned funds. The action may be a withholding of project approvals or withholding of a percentage of the state’s apportionment. The action may be taken when the state does not comply with a required provision of law.

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Public Road

Any road or street under the jurisdiction of and maintained by a public authority and open to public traffic.

Rescission

A legislative action to cancel the obligation of unused budget authority previously provided by Congress before the time when authority would have otherwise lapsed. Rescission may be proposed by the Executive Branch but requires legislative action to become effective.

Revenue Aligned Budget Authority (RABA)

Highway funding levels are adjusted annually according to estimates of Highway Trust Fund receipts. This annual adjustment of funding levels is known as Revenue Aligned Budget Authority, or RABA, and is intended to ensure that highway program funding is closely in line with actual and anticipated revenue to the Highway Account of the Highway Trust Fund.

Right of Way (R-O-W)

Priority paths for the construction and operation of highways.

SAFETEA-LU or Safe, Accountable, Flexible Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users

The last of three “TEA” bills, governing surface transportation policy for fiscal years 2005 through 2009. Also known as “the highway bill”.

Scenic Byway Program

Program to establish scenic byways, which are typically secondary roads having significant cultural, historic, scenic, geological or natural features. They often include vistas, rest areas and interpretive sites.

Single Occupancy Vehicles (SOVs)

This term applies to a vehicle carrying only one person.

State Highway Department

The department, commission, board or official of any state responsible for highway construction, maintenance and management.

State Implementation Plan (SIP)

Required documents prepared by states and submitted to EPA for approval. SIPs identify state actions and programs to implement designated responsibilities under the Clean Air Act.

Surface Transportation Program (STP)

A funding program created in ISTEA and continued in TEA-21. Ten percent for Transportation Enhancement Activities and most of the remaining funds must be allocated within a state on the basis of population. Eligible projects include road and bridge construction and restoration, capital costs for transit projects, highway and transit safety improvements, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, scenic and historical transportation facilities, and preservation of abandoned transportation corridors.

Transportation Control Measures (TCMs)

Local actions to alter traffic patterns or reduce vehicle use that decrease air pollutant emissions. These may include HOV lanes, provision of bicycle facilities, ridesharing, telecommuting, etc.

Transportation Enhancement Activities

A program, created in 1991 under ISTEA and continued through SAFETEA-LU, that reserves highway funds exclusively for use on projects such as pedestrian or bicycle facilities, landscaping or other scenic beautification projects, historic preservation, control and removal of outdoor advertising, archeological planning and research, and mitigation of water pollution due to highway runoff.

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Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21)

The second of three “TEA” bills, TEA-21 authorized federal surface transportation programs for highways, highway safety and transit for the six-year period 1998-2003. TEA-21 included a “budgetary firewall”, continued under SAFTEA-LU, which directly ties federal highway spending to tax revenue flowing into the Highway Account of the Highway Trust Fund.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

A document prepared by states and planning commissions citing projects to be funded under federal transportation programs during a three-year period. Projects must be included in the TIP to receive federal funds, and TIPs must be revised every two years.

Trust Funds

Accounts established by law to hold receipts that are collected by the federal government and earmarked for specific purposes and programs. These receipts are not available for the general purposes of the federal government. The Highway Trust Fund is comprised of receipts from certain highway user taxes (e.g., excise taxes on motor fuel, rubber, and heavy vehicles) and reserved for use for highway construction, mass transportation and related purposes.

U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT)

The federal funding and regulating department for U.S. transportation facilities and programs.

Vehicle Miles of Travel (VMT)

A standard area-wide measure of motor vehicle travel activity. The most conventional VMT calculation is to multiply average length of trip on a daily basis by the total number of trips.