



February 2, 2026

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chair
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
456 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Subject: Restore Certainty of STBG and CMAQ Formula Distribution for Large MPOs

Dear Chair Capito and Ranking Member Whitehouse:

The undersigned county transportation commissions from the largest metropolitan planning area in the nation write to express support for including legislative language in the upcoming surface transportation authorization that would improve flexibility and transparency in the distribution and use of Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) program formula funds. This language was previously submitted to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

For three decades, STBG and CMAQ funds were distributed by population from the California Department of Transportation to the county transportation commissions, as required by state law. This California law reflects the understanding that county transportation commissions are better positioned to identify and select priority projects for STBG and CMAQ funding. Once selected, STBG and CMAQ funding were programmed on projects in the region's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) prepared by its federally designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO), the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG).

In 2021, however, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) ended this long-standing process by requiring MPOs—not county transportation commissions—to have project selection authority for STBG and CMAQ funding. In the case of our respective county transportation commissions, this project selection authority now rests with SCAG. While we respectfully disagree with FHWA's interpretation, the upcoming surface transportation authorization legislation provides an opportunity to correct this issue.

Restoring county transportation commission project selection authority will yield substantial efficiency gains by reducing administrative layers and directing more funding to actual project delivery. County transportation commissions are directly responsible for planning, funding, and implementing multimodal improvements within their jurisdictions; allowing the entities closest to project development to select projects shortens delivery timelines and ensures that STBG and CMAQ funds flow more quickly to shovel-ready needs in a manner that ensures full obligation of federal funds. The current process allows MPOs to retain a portion of these formula funds for regional planning and administrative functions that do not directly advance construction or congestion improvements. The current process also forces local agencies to pursue STBG and CMAQ funding on an annual basis rather than having the certainty to strategize the highest and best use of federal funds for priority projects over

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito, Chair
The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse, Ranking Member
February 2, 2026
Page 2

multi-year periods. The cumulative effect is slower delivery and fewer dollars reaching local projects. Amending federal statute to allow county transportation commissions to once again select projects for STBG and CMAQ program funding will restore a process that is locally responsive, more efficient, and will allow for a selection of projects that better align with the mobility needs of residents, families, and businesses.

SCAG is a valued regional partner. The SCAG region is the largest and most complex metropolitan planning area in the nation, spanning six counties, nearly 200 cities, and over 19 million residents. A single, centralized regional project selection process cannot adequately address the breadth and scope of local transportation and air quality needs across over 38,000 square miles. Restoring the previous distribution framework for STBG and CMAQ formula funding would better serve the diversity and complexity of the region.

As Congress continues to develop a surface transportation authorization bill, we support reinstating the previous formula funding framework, limited to large MPOs with populations over 10 million in states that have codified distribution processes in statute.

The following is the proposed legislative language:

Amend 23 U.S.C. §134(j) with:

(5) Formula distribution in large metropolitan areas.

In metropolitan planning areas with a total population exceeding 10,000,000, as determined by the most recent decennial census, the state department of transportation shall distribute funds provided under sections 133 and 149 to county transportation commissions created under state statute for project selection, based on the following:

- (A) The distribution process for funding under section 133 shall be based on population.
- (B) The distribution process for funding under section 149 shall be based on a formula that accounts for population and attainment status.
- (C) The metropolitan planning organization retains responsibility for the final approval of the transportation improvement program.

The proposed language may also serve as a future model as the nation's population continues to grow – promoting efficiency and local control in high-growth regions to bolster the American economy.

The undersigned county transportation commissions of the SCAG region urge your support for the inclusion of this language in the surface transportation authorization legislation – either during the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee's consideration of the bill or on the Senate floor.

If you have questions regarding our proposal and request, please do not hesitate to contact our respective designated staff.

Sincerely,



Aaron Hake
Executive Director
Riverside County Transportation Commission
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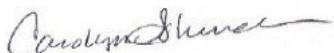
The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito, Chair
The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse, Ranking Member
February 2, 2026
Page 3



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The Honorable Adam Schiff, U.S. Senate