

INTRODUCTION

Finance and revenue data needs are abundant in PL 109-59, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (SAFETEA-LU). The most clear-cut requirements are for data to support highway and public transportation formula apportionments such as the new Safe Routes to Schools Program or the Coordinated Border Infrastructure Program. For grant programs with project-by-project determinations such as the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) capital grant programs, the law is filled with data requirements. Some of those requirements are fairly straightforward such as project cost estimates. Other factors in the investment decisions are not easily quantifiable including benefits to economic development or the positive impacts on capacity of other surface transportation facilities; however, as this paper will show, efforts to quantify the benefits of transportation investment may pay off when it comes time to consider the surface transportation programs of the future. Generally, though, the data requirements related to finance and revenue focus more on justifying the program, determining how transportation affects other things like economic development, and providing some sort of baseline of needs and revenue information so that policymakers can gaze into their crystal balls and envision a future for the highway and transit systems.

Ultimately, most pieces of data related to highways or public transportation, even tangentially, could affect development and implementation of finance and revenue policies. In fact, via the six degrees of separation principle, this paper could grow to encompass most any and all data requirements arising from the law that reauthorized the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). For example, Section 1201 of SAFETEA-LU includes a requirement for establishing a Real-Time System Management Information Program. The law does not include finance and revenue needs as part of the stated purpose of the program. "The Secretary shall establish a real-time system management information program to provide, in all states, the capability to monitor, in real time, the traffic and travel conditions of the major highways of the United States and to share that information to improve the security of the surface transportation system, to address congestion problems, to support improved response to weather events and surface transportation incidents, and to facilitate national and regional highway traveler information." (PL 109-59, p. 54)

The law does not include finance and revenue benefits in the purpose of the Program, but the data collected may ultimately be used for determining where to target congestion program funding, or to create a variable pricing structure for a new tolled lane, or to provide the rationale for new national funding formulas – or even to estimate the potential revenue impact from a vehicle-miles-traveled collection system. Other provisions in SAFETEA-LU could be viewed similarly. The SAFETEA-LU requirement for a National Tribal Transportation Facility Inventory is also tangentially related to future finance and revenue issues. This "comprehensive national inventory of transportation facilities that are eligible for assistance under the Indian reservation roads program" will provide information on the size and scope of Tribal transportation facilities and could be incorporated into a model to estimate needs on those facilities.

The bottom line is this: SAFETEA-LU creates and funds tremendous opportunities to collect the basic information on which future financing structures for surface transportation at the Federal, State and local levels may be constructed. While finance and revenue concerns may be secondary or even unstated, when considering all of the data requirements embedded in SAFETEA-LU it is important to make available that data in accurate, standardized and accessible formats to analysts and policy makers considering finance and revenue issues at all levels of government to enable planning for the future of financing the nation's surface transportation system.

SAFETEA-LU DATA IMPLICATIONS EMBEDDED IN LEGISLATION

Revenue Forecasting

The business of designing, building, operating, maintaining and financing surface transportation infrastructure is highly dependent on accurate revenue forecasts. Receipt estimates from all sources are the most important finance and revenue data needs at all levels of government. State Departments of Transportation (DOTs) and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) need accurate forecasts of multiple transportation and non-transportation related revenue sources to create and maintain State Transportation Improvement Program and Transportation Improvement Program plans that describe their "programs" – the infrastructure investments they plan to make. Because of Federal fiscal constraint requirements, the TIPs and STIPs are must show what sources of funding will be available to pay for the projects. Without accurate revenue forecasts, DOTs and MPOs could over- or under-program their resources. The consequences to a DOT that over promises and under delivers on its program can be dire at many levels – from undermining the public's trust and confidence in the DOT and its leadership, which may impede the DOTs ability to make its case to the legislature during appropriations, to running afoul of Federal guidance, regulation or law. Precision in forecasting is an oxymoronic concept, but critical nonetheless.

Forecasting Federal Excise Tax Receipts

A major component of overall highway funding nationwide is the Federal-aid Highway Program. Although the percentage varies from state to state, on average 45% of total capital investment comes from the Federal government. Evolution in Federal policy has made accurate forecasting of fuel tax receipts and other excise taxes that are deposited into the Highway Trust Fund even more important. Differences between estimated and actual receipts can affect overall spending on highways and public transportation via SAFETEA-LU Section 1105, Revenue Aligned Budget Authority (RABA).

Through the Revenue Aligned Budget Authority provision in TEA-21, Congress made explicit that the spending from the Highway Trust Fund should match receipts in order to prevent a buildup of balances. RABA essentially was a codification in TEA-21 of the guaranteed spending concept, the term used colloquially to describe the mechanism by which revenue receipt forecasts are tied directly to Federal spending on highways and public transit. Thus, multi-year authorization levels based on receipt forecasts in theory enable DOTs to program STIPs against make reasonably accurate estimates of the Federal apportionments that will be available to them.

In practice, the relationship between revenue estimates and actual receipts is not always predictable. Consider, for example, the amounts TEA-21 used as the basis for RABA calculations in 2000-2004 and how they could have been adjusted under the RABA mechanism. These amounts are designated in Section 8103 of that act as the “Level of Obligation Limitation for purposes of section 251(b) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 based on Treasury Department receipt estimates at the time TEA-21 was passed.

	Section 8103 Obligation Limitation	RABA-Adjusted Obligation Limitation	Difference	Percent Difference
2000	\$26,629			
2001	27,158			
2002	27,767			
2003	28,233			

As FY 2002 illustrated, when receipts come in differently than forecasted, unpleasant surprises result. Politically the reduction in obligation limitation proved to be unpalatable and so RABA as passed in TEA-21 was never truly exercised. To hedge against political unpredictability and protect against future negative adjustments, RABA was modified in SAFETEA-LU to prohibit downward revisions as long as the Highway Trust Fund balance remains above \$6 billion.

However, a recent study by the Chamber of Commerce Foundation shows the balances in the so-called “highway account” of the Highway Trust Fund will drop below \$6 billion as early as 2007, so even these RABA modifications may not protect States against drops in Federal funding. The mere fact that SAFETEA-LU authorizes spending of the HTF down to its last penny makes revenue forecasting even more important. SAFETEA-LU counts on receipts from sources such as increased enforcement of fuel tax evasion measures to keep the Highway Trust Fund solvent. There is still uncertainty around just how much additional funding will be received from increased enforcement, so people are waiting with bated breath to learn if the prediction of revenue tied to such SAFETEA-LU measures as improved fuel tax evasion enforcement come true.

In the near future, Congress may find itself facing the unpleasant situation of taking action to either increase receipts or to cut spending authorized by SAFETEA-LU. Essentially, this impending crisis brings the considerations on which Congress hoped to allow the two finance and revenue related Commissions to deliberate even more necessary to consider in the very near future. Unfortunately, it is doubtful that up-to-date, accurate aggregate data on the impacts of Federal surface transportation infrastructure related to creating and sustaining jobs, improving congestion, or generating economic benefits will be available to inform such an imminent debate.

Attribution Lags and Equity Bonus

The fight over donor state equity that dominated much of Capitol Hill’s discussion during TEA-21 reauthorization was exacerbated by the two-year lag in data that reflects excise tax receipts in individual states. The program established in SAFETEA-LU, Equity Bonus, apportions contract authority based on the relationship between a State’s contributions (as

determined by attribution data) and a designated rate of return on the State's percent contributions into the Highway Trust Fund.

Some donor states (those receiving less than 95% of their percent of contributions to the Highway Trust Fund) allege that the lag time for fuel tax attributions poses a problem in that there may be a delay in receiving their fair share of apportionments. Further, in the context of rising fuel prices and the uncertainty that creates about future tax receipts, RABA, and the solvency of the highway trust fund in the short term, timeliness of accurate data is even more important than ever before. The data community needs to examine whether technology exists to use newer data for purposes of calculating the core program formulae, including Equity Bonus, and overall receipts.

Commissions

In the finance and revenue data needs arena, the most important, pressing needs is providing the two commissions mandated in Sections 1909 and 11142 with the background information needed to make recommendations on the future funding of surface transportation in the United States. In the table below is an excerpt of the requirements laid down for the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Commission. This commission, described in Section 1909, is directed to take a comprehensive and detailed look at needs and revenues, existing and forecasted, in order to propose a conceptual plan for the future. It is notable that the conceptual plan also requires recommendations on design and operational standards, implying knowledge of that information as well.

Commission	Resources Allocated	Legislative Excerpts
SEC. 1909. FUTURE OF SURFACE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM (b) National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Commission (PL 109-59, pages 328-334)	\$2.8 billion	(A) IN GENERAL- The Commission shall-- (i) conduct a comprehensive study of— (I) current condition and future needs; (II) short-term sources of Highway Trust Fund revenues; (III) long-term alternatives to replace or supplement the fuel tax; (IV) revenue sources to fund the needs of the surface transportation system over at least the 30-year period; (V) revenues flowing into the Highway Trust Fund under laws in existence on the date of enactment of this Act, including individual components of the overall flow of revenues; (VI) whether the amount of revenues described in subclause (V) is likely to increase, decrease, or remain constant absent any change in law, taking into consideration the impact of possible changes in public vehicular choice, fuel use, and travel alternatives that could be expected to reduce or increase revenues into the Highway Trust Fund; (B) develop a conceptual plan, with alternative approaches, to ensure that the surface transportation system will continue to serve the needs of the United States, including specific recommendations regarding design and operational standards, Federal policies, and legislative changes;

Even as a stand-alone study the needs component of the Section 1909 requirement would be more comprehensive than prior studies.

Section 1909 (5) SURFACE TRANSPORTATION NEEDS- With respect to surface transportation needs, the investigation and study shall specifically address--

- (A) the current **condition and performance of the Interstate System** (including the physical condition of bridges and pavements and operational characteristics and performance), relying primarily on existing data sources;
- (B) the future of the Interstate System, based on a range of legislative and policy approaches for 15-, 30-, and 50-year time periods;
- (C) the expected **demographics** and business uses that impact the surface transportation system;
- (D) the expected use of the surface transportation system, including the effects of changing **vehicle types**, modes of transportation, **fleet size and weights**, and traffic volumes;
- (E) desirable design policies and standards for future improvements of the surface transportation system, including additional access points;
- (F) the identification of **urban, rural, national, and interregional needs** for the surface transportation system;
- (G) the potential for expansion, upgrades, or other changes to the surface transportation system, including--
 - (i) deployment of advanced materials and intelligent technologies;
 - (ii) critical multistate, urban, and rural corridors needing capacity, safety, and operational enhancements;
 - (iii) improvements to intermodal linkages;
 - (iv) security and military deployment enhancements;
 - (v) strategies to enhance asset preservation; and
 - (vi) implementation strategies;
- (H) the improvement of emergency preparedness and evacuation using the surface transportation system, including--
 - (i) examination of the potential use of all modes of the surface transportation system in the safe and efficient evacuation of citizens during times of emergency;
 - (ii) identification of the location of critical bottlenecks; and
 - (iii) development of strategies to improve system redundancy, especially in areas with a high potential for terrorist attacks;
- (I) alternatives for addressing environmental concerns associated with the future development of the surface transportation system;
- (J) the assessment of the current and future capabilities for conducting system-wide real-time performance data collection and analysis, traffic monitoring, and transportation systems operations and management; and
- (K) policy and legislative alternatives for addressing future needs for the surface transportation system.

Fortunately, the National Surface Transportation Infrastructure Funding Commission authorized in Section 11142 has similar data requirements, albeit a narrower scope. Current and potential revenues and highway and transit needs provide the basis for this Commission's analysis.

<p>SECTION 11142. NATIONAL SURFACE TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE FINANCING COMMISSION (PL 109-59 PDF, pages 818-820)</p>	<p>“Funding for the commission shall be provided by the Secretary of the Treasury and by the Secretary of Transportation, out of funds available to those agencies for administrative and policy functions.”</p>	<p>(b) Function. – (1) In General. – The Commission shall, with respect to the period beginning on the date of enactment of this Act and ending before 2016— (A) make a thorough investigation and study of revenues flowing into the Highway Trust Fund under current law, including the individual components of the overall flow of such revenues; (B) Consider whether the amounts are likely to increase, decline or remain unchanged, absent changes in the law, particularly by taking into account the impact of possible changes in public vehicular choice, fuel use, or travel alternatives that could be expected to reduce or increase revenues into the Highway Trust Fund; (C) Consider alternative approaches to generating revenues for the Highway Trust Fund and the level of revenues such alternatives would yield; (D) Consider highway and transit needs and whether additional revenues into the Highway Trust Fund or other Federal revenues dedicated to highway and transit infrastructure, would be required in order to meet those needs; (E) Consider a program that would exempt all or a portion of of gasoline or other motor fuels used in a State from the Federal excise tax on gasoline or other motor fuels if such a state elects not to receive all or a portion of Federal transportation funding, including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) whether such State should be required to increase State gasoline or other motor fuels taxes by the amount of the decrease in the Federal excise tax on such gasoline or other motor fuels (ii) whether any Federal transportation funding should not be reduced or eliminate for States participating in such a program; and (iii) whether there are any compliance problems related to enforcement of Federal transportation related excise taxes under such program; and (iv) study such other matters closely related to the subjects described in the preceding subparagraphs as it may deem appropriate.
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The commissions need consistent, comprehensive, unbiased data in formats that are compatible and easily analyzed. This will be easier said than done. There are some provisions in SAFETEA-LU that appear to provide for a source of some of this needs-related information. For example, the Bureau of Transportation Statistics is charged with “Collecting, compiling, analyzing, and publishing a comprehensive set of transportation statistics on the performance and impacts of the national transportation system, including statistics on...traffic flows...vehicle weights and other vehicle characteristics, demographic, economic and other variables influencing traveling behavior... the extent, connectivity, and condition of the transportation system.” (Section 5601(c)(5)). BTS is required by SAFETEA-LU to “(A) identify, in order of priority, the

transportation data that is not being collected by the Bureau, operating administrations of the Department, or other Federal, State, or local entities, but is needed to improve transportation decisionmaking (sic) at the Federal, State, and local levels and to fulfill the requirements of subsection (c)(5)” and to make recommendations on what entity at the Federal, State or local level should collect that data. If the BTS section of SAFETEA-LU is interpreted strictly, the success or failure of the commissions could rest with the ability of BTS to effectively carry out its duties.

Three significant questions arise from these considerations. First, are there enough resources allocated such that data providers and policy makers can leverage them to provide the Commissions with the information they need? Second, will for example, BTS choose to determine that the Commission-related requires are “of a higher priority than data currently being collected” as they are allowed to do under Section 5601(d)(2)(C)? Third, is there enough time to fill the gaps in data in order for the Commission to meet its deadline?

If anything should be clear in the data needs related to finance and revenue, it is that a comprehensive picture of current and projected needs across the highway and public transportation systems and of revenue sources and their potential receipts at the Federal, State and local levels of government are fundamental to meeting the requirements of SAFETEA-LU.

Data to Calculate Apportionments and Allocations

The new Title I programs requiring additional data to support apportionment of funds are straightforward, and FHWA was able to produce apportionment estimates quickly, implying that the data was readily available. Take, for example, the data requirements underlying the formulas in the Safe Routes to School and the Coordinated Border Infrastructure Program. The Safe Routes to School Program (Section 1404) requires the Secretary of Transportation to determine the ratio of total enrollment in elementary and middle schools in each state total enrollment nationwide. To apportion \$833 million in contract authority for the Coordinated Border Infrastructure Program, FHWA needed to compile data on vehicles that pass through land border ports of entry including incoming commercial trucks, and personal motor vehicles and buses; the weight of incoming cargo by commercial trucks; and a count of the land border ports of entry on a state-by-state and aggregate basis. Given that FHWA was able to generate apportionment tables (RTA-1664a.xls) for these programs, it seems safe to assume that this data was readily available.

Much of the funding allocated through the Federal Transit Administration requires more detailed data to quantify the rationale for its distribution. Take Major Capital Investment Grants of \$75 million or more (Section 3011(d)(2)) for example. The explicit and implicit data requirements are enormous. To the extent that these requirements are satisfied by qualitative descriptions, supporting allocations such as those in FTA’s capital programs appears achievable.

`(2) APPROVAL OF GRANTS- The Secretary may approve a grant under this section for a major new fixed guideway capital project only if the Secretary, based upon evaluations and considerations set forth in paragraph (3), determines that the project is--

`(A) based on the results of an alternatives analysis and preliminary engineering;

`(B) justified based on a comprehensive review of its mobility improvements, environmental benefits, cost effectiveness, operating efficiencies, economic development effects, and public transportation supportive land use policies and future patterns; and

- `(C) supported by an acceptable degree of local financial commitment (including evidence of stable and dependable financing sources) to construct, maintain, and operate the system or extension, and maintain and operate the entire public transportation system without requiring a reduction in existing public transportation services or level of service to operate the proposed project.
- `(3) EVALUATION OF PROJECT JUSTIFICATION- In making the determinations under paragraph (2)(B) for a major capital investment grant, the Secretary shall analyze, evaluate, and consider--
- `(A) the results of the alternatives analysis and preliminary engineering for the proposed project;
 - `(B) the reliability of the forecasting methods used to estimate costs and utilization made by the recipient and the contractors to the recipient;
 - `(C) the direct and indirect costs of relevant alternatives;
 - `(D) factors such as--
 - `(i) congestion relief;
 - `(ii) improved mobility;
 - `(iii) air pollution;
 - `(iv) noise pollution;
 - `(v) energy consumption; and
 - `(vi) all associated ancillary and mitigation costs necessary to carry out each alternative analyzed;
 - `(E) reductions in local infrastructure costs and other benefits achieved through compact land use development, such as positive impacts on the capacity, utilization, or longevity of other surface transportation assets and facilities;
 - `(F) the cost of suburban sprawl;
 - `(G) the degree to which the project increases the mobility of the public transportation dependent population or promotes economic development;
 - `(H) population density and current transit ridership in the transportation corridor;
 - `(J) any adjustment to the project justification necessary to reflect differences in local land, construction, and operating costs; and
 - `(K) other factors that the Secretary determines to be appropriate to carry out this subsection.

The big question is whether FTA will be able to compare an application from California with an application from South Carolina given different data collection methods across States and MPOs.

Oversight Requirements

State DOTs and other major project sponsors using Federal funds are about to be faced with a massive set of data-driven requirements due to the expansion of oversight provisions in SAFETEA-LU. Project management plans and finance plans for projects with costs at \$100 million or more have the potential to be useful tools for project sponsors, both in terms of planning and to bolster public trust and confidence in the project.

Section 1904 Stewardship and Oversight

(h) Major Projects.--

- (1) In general.--Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, a recipient of Federal financial assistance for a project under this title with an estimated total cost of \$500,000,000 or more, and recipients for such other projects as may be identified by the Secretary, shall submit to the Secretary for each project--
 - (A) a project management plan; and
 - (B) an annual financial plan.
- (2) Project management plan.--A project management plan shall document--
 - (A) the procedures and processes that are in effect to provide timely information to the project decisionmakers to effectively manage the scope, costs, schedules, and quality of, and the Federal requirements applicable to, the project; and
 - (B) the role of the agency leadership and management team in the delivery of the project.

(3) Financial plan.--A financial plan shall--

- (A) be based on detailed estimates of the cost to complete the project; and
- (B) provide for the annual submission of updates to the Secretary that are based on reasonable assumptions, as determined by the Secretary, of future increases in the cost to complete the project.

“(i) Other Projects.--A recipient of Federal financial assistance for a project under this title with an estimated total cost of \$100,000,000 or more that is not covered by subsection (h) shall prepare an annual financial plan. Annual financial plans prepared under this subsection shall be made available to the Secretary for review upon the request of the Secretary.”.

These requirements come with three major data challenges. First, expectations of the content and level of detail in these plans are not yet clear. Second, FHWA needs to be cautious not to create guidance or regulations that require project sponsors to produce multiple FHWA or DOT oversight products including similar data (but probably not similar enough to substitute one plan’s answers for another oversight report). Finally, the authors of guidance or regulation need to beware of setting unreasonable expectations of these plans. As has been illustrated time and again, cost estimates evolve with changes in scope and inflation; Acts of God change schedules; political forces shift project focus; and sometimes the expected value of a number is estimated with only 10% certainty – so the accuracy of data must be portrayed carefully and appropriately characterized.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE OF SURFACE TRANSPORTATION POLICY – EVOLVING MANAGEMENT APPROACHES

Finance and revenue data needs are not limited to identifying the “needs” and finding the money. Operational efficiency, asset management, and leveraging capital assets are becoming more reality than buzzwords. Owners and operators of surface transportation infrastructure need to grapple with how to identify and collect data that underlies new management approaches. With private sector investors entering the picture, transportation funding requires more than knowledge of grants management and cash flows. The Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) 34 requirements provide some foundation for identifying data that can be put to use in new management approaches. If asset owners (State DOTs and MPOs) deepen their understanding of and capability for asset valuation a new world of engineering will be incorporated into State DOTs – financial engineering. Imagine management with an eye toward leveraging existing assets as a basis for financing new construction, or even selling or leasing those assets over the long term. States, MPOs and other capital stock owners will need a complete catalog of those assets, their conditions, service lives, and deterioration patterns for accurate asset valuations. Then, to translate this information into financial terms will require skills that are now found typically in corporate finance departments, investment banks, and elsewhere in the private sector.

CHALLENGES AND CONCLUSION

Fundamentally, the availability of data in a useable format across regions and on a national level will be critical to its usefulness. This is reflected by legislative language requiring the establishment of “data exchange formats to ensure that the data...can be readily be

exchanged across jurisdictional boundaries.” This is easier said than done. Perhaps the most daunting challenge facing the data community is the challenge of collecting data from 50 State DOTs, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, and numerous MPOs. From these different entities with their varying data collection, storage and analysis methods, are supposed to come a coherent national catalog of finance mechanisms and revenue sources; a compilation of highway and public transportation needs; and comprehensive information on economic impacts of transportation on which to base the future of surface transportation policy.

Add to this the abject lack of resources creating numerous unfunded or under funded mandates, and the situation is almost laughable. For example, the commissions themselves have very limited resources, especially compared to other funding allocations in SAFETEA-LU. This example seems particularly illustrative: one earmark in SAFETEA-LU provides \$1 million for a study of a single interchange project located in Prince George's County, Maryland. According to Section (1961)(b), “As part of the study, the Secretary shall collect data regarding the economic impact of the project, including new jobs and State and county revenues in the form of real estate property taxes, retail sales taxes, and income and hotel sales and occupancy taxes.” The entire Section 1909 commission receives only \$2.8 million (\$1.4 each year for 2 years) to provide recommendations on the future of the entire U.S. surface transportation system, and the Section 11142 commission is to receive its funding “out of funds available to the Departments of Transportation and Treasury for administrative and policy functions.” It is without question that the commissions will have to rely on many of the other resources, directly and indirectly funded through SAFETEA-LU, for the data and the analysis of that data in order to make the required recommendations.

This leaves State DOTs and MPOs, and other members of the data community, responsible for serving many masters and potentially largely responsible for orchestrating coordination among the entities making requests for data. In fact, AASHTO Director of Engineering and Technical Services, Dr. Anthony R. Kane, went so far as to suggest creation of strategic plans for data, a business case analysis for data requirements, and data partnerships in order to address what he identified as “reauthorization data concerns” in a presentation to the AASHTO Administrative Subcommittee on Information Systems. These concerns included:

- Unfunded mandates
- Timelines
- Coordination with multiple levels of government and agencies
- Data collection, storage, and analysis methods
- Competition with State priorities: e.g. performance measures, asset management
- Need to tie to existing statewide planning processes

and apply broadly to data needs in the emerging new data demand areas of safety, freight, environment, congestion/incidents/operations, security, project oversight, and, of course, finance. (*Data / Information Related Provision in Transportation Reauthorization Bills*, Dr. Anthony R. Kane, May 18, 2005, to Annual Meeting of AASHTO Administrative Subcommittee on Information Systems.)

In addition to the classic challenges of coordination, accuracy, standardization and accessibility, the ultimate audience for much of the finance and revenue data is a weighty consideration. Finance and revenue data in the hands of politicians can be a deadly weapon. Much of what is required in SAFETEA-LU is designed to lay the groundwork for the next surface transportation authorization bill due in 2009. Conclusions drawn from the information presented to the Commissions, Congress and the Administration will contribute to new views of the relative local, State, Federal and private sector roles in surface transportation. The information could be the basis for new funding formulas or for changing the Federal approach to surface transportation all together. The data implications of SAFETEA-LU should not be taken lightly. Unfortunately, time, financial resources and expertise will most certainly be less than what is needed to meet all of the requirements embedded in SAFETEA-LU. The ultimate decision for the data community and policymakers will be whether to prioritize and work toward perfection in some areas, or to not let the perfect be the enemy of the good across the broad spectrum of finance and revenue requirements.

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