



FRAME FOR MOBILITY · POLICY PAPERS

PART VI — A LEGACY OF MOBILITY

The conclusion as policy: a stewardship settlement, a transparency settlement, and a solvency settlement, held to a single test.

The Framework for Rebuilding America's Mobility Economy (FRAME) Act, as presented in the FRAME Policy Paper (January 2026)

PART VI

A LEGACY OF MOBILITY

Part VI is the Policy Paper's conclusion, and this paper treats it as what it is: not a program title and not a summary, but the statement of the settlement the Act is designed to leave in place. The paper calls the FRAME Act a fundamental break from a 20th-century mindset that has reached its physical, fiscal and environmental limits, and it judges the Act by a legacy question — whether the country is left with crumbling overpasses and rising fatalities, or with a mobility economy that is resilient, equitable and technologically sophisticated. This paper sets out the three durable changes Part VI identifies — stewardship, transparency and solvency — and the instruments from Parts II through V that carry each of them, so that the conclusion can be read, and tested, as policy.

THE POLICY

The first element is a stewardship doctrine. National policy is centered on a State of Good Repair and the Safe System Approach (Sec. 103): the greatest assets are the ones already built, and the Act refuses the premise that congestion is to be solved by building out of it. The second element is a transparency doctrine. Digital infrastructure (Sec. 107) and the National Infrastructure Data Portal (Sec. 410) end anecdotal planning; the health of each state's network is a public fact, and policy is shaped by data and accountability rather than political expediency — the paper calls this the democratization of infrastructure. The third element is a solvency doctrine. The Highway Trust Fund is to be made solvent by a user-based revenue model, reached through the American VMT Choice Pilot (Sec. 708), in which policy change occurs via user choice between a simple and a smart system. Together the three doctrines define what the Act means by a mobility economy: the movement of people, goods and ideas with efficiency, safety and dignity, as the country looks toward the 2030s and beyond.

WHAT IT WILL DO

Part VI operates by fixing the hierarchy among the Act's earlier mechanisms so that they persist as a system. The Variable Federal Cost-Share (Sec. 106) becomes a standing fiscal conscience: because the 90/100/50 rates apply at project level, preservation is rewarded and unnecessary expansion penalised continuously, not at authorisation alone. The performance framework of Part III — targets (Sec. 402), the five percent bonus pool (Sec. 105) and the Safety Performance Forfeiture (Sec. 403) — becomes the standing means by which the stewardship doctrine is enforced rather than merely declared, with the State Infrastructure Health Report Card (Sec. 407) as its public face. The revenue sequence of Part V becomes the standing route out of insolvency: bridge measures first (Secs. 702, 704—

705), then a tested conversion, ending in a report to Congress with a legislative framework (Sec. 711). What the conclusion adds is the criterion of judgement: success is the condition and safety of the inherited network, the openness of its account, and the solvency of its fund — measured against the explicit national goal of eliminating traffic fatalities and serious injuries.

WHAT IT SOLVES

The conclusion names the condition the Act exists to end: decline managed rather than reversed. Physically, an expansion-era network deteriorates while policy continues to reward new construction. Fiscally, insolvency has been sustained for a generation by emergency transfers — over \$275 billion from the General Fund since 2008 — without a replacement revenue model. Institutionally, opacity has kept both failures from public account: without a common, public statement of system health, decline has no owner. Part VI's position is that these are one failure with three faces, and that a statute answering only one of them would leave the others to reproduce it. The Act therefore answers with matched instruments — pricing that favors repair, measurement that is public by default, and revenue rebuilt on use — and the conclusion's contribution is to state, on the record, the legacy standard against which the combination should be judged. In the paper's closing formulation, the choice is between managing decline and engineering progress.

PLANNED AND MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

STATED IN THE PAPER

- A State of Good Repair and the Safe System Approach centered in national policy (Sec. 103), with the elimination of all traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries as the explicit national goal.
- Preservation rewarded and unnecessary expansion penalised through the Variable Federal Cost-Share (Sec. 106).
- Radical transparency in place of anecdotal planning: the health of every state's network visible on a public report card (Sec. 407) and tracked through the National Infrastructure Data Portal (Sec. 410).
- A route to a solvent Highway Trust Fund through the five-year American VMT Choice Pilot (Sec. 708) and the conversion framework reported to Congress (Sec. 711).
- Part VI states no additional numeric commitments; the figures it relies on are those of Parts II–V, including the \$275B+ in General Fund transfers since 2008 that define the insolvency it answers.

INDICATORS THE PAPER IMPLIES (NOT STATED TARGETS)

- Trend in the condition of existing pavement, bridge and transit assets.
- Trend in traffic fatalities and serious injuries against the Sec. 103 goal.
- The preservation-to-capacity balance in federal-aid obligations.
- Highway Trust Fund balance across the pilot period and under the Sec. 711 framework.
- Sustained public and congressional use of the report card and portal as the system's account.

FRAME for Mobility is a project supported by the Institute for Civic Service.

THE EVIDENCE

THE PROBLEM IN NUMBERS

The problems this Part answers: the condition of the assets the nation already owns, and a legacy of deferral that hands the next generation a larger bill.

Roads: D+.

ASCE's 2025 Report Card grades America's roads D+, with 39 percent of major roads in poor or mediocre condition, and puts the total infrastructure funding gap at \$3.7 trillion over the next decade; driving on deteriorated roads costs the average driver more than \$1,400 a year in repairs and operating costs.

American Society of Civil Engineers, *2025 Report Card for America's Infrastructure* (2025).

Bridges: C — and half the stock is "fair."

Bridges earn a C: 6.8 percent are in poor condition (down from 7.3 percent in 2020), but 49.1 percent are rated only fair — the cohort that tips into poor without preservation.

American Society of Civil Engineers, *2025 Report Card for America's Infrastructure* (2025).

\$176 billion.

As the Presentation Deck states it: the transit state-of-good-repair backlog stands at \$176 billion, up 125 percent in real terms from \$78 billion (FTA/ASCE).

-34 percent.

As the Presentation Deck states it: transit ridership is down 34 percent from its 2014 peak (APTA, *2024 Fact Book*)

a legacy of systems whose condition and reliability stopped keeping pace with the cities they serve.

5:1 and 12:1.

Preservation is radically cheaper than the failure it prevents: Caltrans' published life-cycle comparison puts pavement preservation at \$90,000 per lane-mile against \$442,000 for rehabilitation (about 5:1), and bridge preservation at \$60,000 against \$720,000 (12:1). — California Department of Transportation, *2009 Five-Year Maintenance Plan*. <http://dot.ca.gov/-/media/dot-media/programs/legislative-affairs/documents/f0007238-report-fiveyearmaintenanceplan-acc-a11y.pdf> *The safety dimension of the legacy — pedestrian deaths up 57 percent since 2000 (NHTSA/GHSA), per the Presentation Deck

is carried in Part III, where the safety performance regime sits.*

WHY THIS APPROACH IS THE MODERN ONE

The legacy approach funds the ribbon-cutting and defers the upkeep: new capacity is politically visible, preservation is not, so assets are run down the deterioration curve until the only options left are rehabilitation and reconstruction at multiples of the preservation cost (figure 5). The condition data describe the result precisely — a road network graded D+ (figure 1), a bridge stock whose largest single category is "fair" and ageing toward poor (figure 2), and a transit repair backlog that has more than doubled in real terms (figure 3). Asset-management economics is unambiguous about the ordering: money spent keeping good assets good returns several times money spent rescuing failed ones. FRAME writes that ordering into law rather than guidance — state of good repair is named the highest priority in the national policy (Sec. 103), and the variable cost-share pays for it like it means it: 90 percent federal share for state-of-good-repair work against 50 percent for new general-purpose lanes (Sec. 106), with asset condition carried on the public report card (Sec. 407) so deferral becomes visible before it becomes failure.

The legacy is also a service legacy. Ridership down a third from its peak (figure 4) is not only a demand problem; it tracks decades of systems maintained to a standard their riders could feel. FRAME treats condition, reliability and access as one inheritance — repair first, measure publicly, and price expansion honestly — so the system handed forward is an asset rather than a liability with a ribbon on it.

EVIDENCE CHECK

the preservation ratios in figure 5 come from agency life-cycle cost models (Caltrans, 2009), not controlled experiments; the direction of the result is consistent across FHWA and AASHTO asset-management practice, but the exact multiples vary by asset type, climate and traffic.

SOURCES

1. <https://rebuildsocal.org/2025/03/americas-infrastructure-report-card-2025/>
2. <https://www.roadbridges.com:443/infrastructure/article/55277020/2025-asce-report-card-bridges-earn-c-roads-get-d>



FRAME for Mobility

A project supported by the Institute for Civic Service. This paper presents Part VI of the FRAME Act as set out in the FRAME Policy Paper (January 2026), with the evidence on which it rests. Figures follow the Policy Paper; research figures are attributed to their sources.