



FRAME

A Surface Transportation Act
for the 21st Century

POLICY PAPER
SUMMARY
JANUARY 2026

FRAME FOR MOBILITY

POLICY PAPER

A summary of the FRAME Policy Paper

The Framework for Rebuilding America's Mobility Economy (FRAME) Act

PART I

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The American surface transportation system has reached a critical inflection point. The funding and planning model built in the mid-20th century favored highway expansion over the maintenance of existing assets and the diversification of mobility options. Its legacy is a staggering backlog of maintenance and repair, a persistent public health crisis of roadway fatalities, and a Highway Trust Fund that is fundamentally insolvent.

The FRAME Act is a comprehensive legislative response: not a routine reauthorization, but a foundational shift in how the United States invests in, manages, and sustains its mobility network, moving the federal role from passive provider of capital to active steward of a data-driven, performance-based mobility economy. Its national policy (**Sec. 103**) puts safety first through the Safe System Approach, makes a state of good repair the highest investment priority, treats data and technology as infrastructure, pays for performance, speeds project delivery, and puts revenue on a sustainable, user-based footing.

THE SETTLEMENT IN NUMBERS

\$275B+

General Fund transfers sustaining the Highway Trust Fund since 2008

18.4¢

Federal gas tax per gallon, unchanged since 1993

90/100/50

Cost-share: repair, safety and digital, new lanes (**Sec. 106**)

5%

Performance bonus pool from block grant funds (**Sec. 105**)

1%

Safety forfeiture of formula funds (**Sec. 403**)

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THE ARCHITECTURE OF REFORM

The current federal model rewards expansion over stewardship. The FRAME Act restructures it, repealing a myriad of legacy programs and consolidating formula funding into three primary block grants. States and local governments gain flexibility to address regional challenges under strict performance targets. The Strategic Infrastructure Investment Program (**Sec. 303**) funds transformative projects too large for formula funding, such as high-capacity transit systems and major bridge replacements. The Act also modernizes the definition of a capital project: software, data systems, and digital twins are legally construed as infrastructure (**Sec. 107**), because in a modern mobility economy, bits are as essential as bricks.

THE THREE BLOCK GRANTS

State of Good Repair & Resiliency (Sec. 203): maintenance and rehabilitation of existing pavement, bridges, tunnels, and transit assets, the highest national priority, with resiliency retrofits.

National Commerce & Freight (Sec. 207): freight efficiency and the national supply chain: bottlenecks, ports, and intermodal connections.

Community Access & Mobility (Sec. 211): connecting people to jobs and services, including transit operations, active transportation, and on-demand microtransit.

THE VARIABLE FEDERAL COST-SHARE (SEC. 106)

The Act replaces the traditional 80/20 split with incentives: a maintenance premium of **90 percent** federal share for state of good repair projects, **100 percent** for proven safety countermeasures and qualified digital infrastructure, and a capacity penalty of **50 percent** for new general-purpose lane projects on the National Highway System.

PERFORMANCE OVER PAVEMENT

The Act turns the Department of Transportation from a check-writing entity into a performance-driven steward. Under Pay for Performance (**Sec. 402**), every state sets data-driven targets for its own system across safety, condition, congestion, and reliability, coordinated with metropolitan planning organizations and transit providers and approved by the Secretary. States that significantly exceed their targets draw from a performance bonus pool of five percent of total block grant funds (**Sec. 105**). A National Transportation Data Standard (**Sec. 409**) makes state data consistent, comparable, and machine-readable, published through the Infrastructure Health Report Card (**Sec. 407**), the Carbon and VMT Scorecard (**Sec. 408**), and the National Infrastructure Data Portal (**Sec. 410**).

THE SAFETY PERFORMANCE FORFEITURE (SEC. 403)

Roadway fatalities are no longer an acceptable byproduct of mobility. A state that fails to make significant progress toward its safety targets for three consecutive fiscal years forfeits one percent of its formula funds. The money does not return to the Treasury: the Secretary reinvests it as competitive grants to local entities in that same state, funding local safety projects.

THE INNOVATION FRONTIER

Innovation, the paper argues, is not new gadgets. It is the structural ability of an agency to adapt, deliver, and modernize its service to meet the actual needs of the public. The Act attacks the “time tax” of bureaucratic inertia by making the Environmental Review Assignment Program permanent (**Sec. 501**), so states with the technical capacity can assume federal environmental review responsibilities, cutting timelines by years in some cases, without compromising rigor. Capacity-Building Grants (**Sec. 502**) help state departments of transportation hire the legal and technical experts to carry those responsibilities. AV-Ready Infrastructure Standards (**Sec. 607**) prepare the network for connected and autonomous vehicles with machine-readable pavement markings, digitally readable traffic control devices, and digital twins of the highway system, while a national Vehicle-to-Everything Deployment Strategy (**Sec. 608**) supports roadside units that let vehicles talk to signals and see around blind corners.

PARATRANSIT MODERNIZATION (SECS. 601 TO 604)

For riders with disabilities, the status quo means day-ahead booking and long, unpredictable waits. The Paratransit Modernization Pilot Program offers regulatory waivers to agencies that commit to a quantifiably superior service under a binding performance contract: measurable reductions in trip wait times, modern on-demand dispatching, expanded service areas, and higher reliability, so that access means true mobility, not just a ride.

THE FISCAL HONESTY

For decades, the paper says, the nation has engaged in fiscal theater over how it pays for roads and rails. The federal gasoline tax stands at 18.4 cents per gallon, unchanged since 1993, and the Highway Trust Fund has been effectively dead since 2008, surviving on emergency General Fund bailouts totaling over \$275 billion. The Act also directs revenue from tariffs and duties on imported steel and iron into the Highway Trust Fund (**Sec. 702**). As the fleet electrifies, the link between using the road and buying fuel is severed, and the revenue model has to be rebuilt on what a vehicle actually uses: the road itself.

FAIR SHARE AND THE VMT CHOICE

Fair Share for Fair Roads (Sec. 704): a transitional fee on battery electric vehicles, subject to an Equity Cap (**Sec. 705**) so no EV owner pays more than the average gas-tax contribution of a traditional light-duty vehicle.

American VMT Choice Pilot (Sec. 708): a five-year nationwide pilot of a Vehicle Miles Traveled fee: a privacy-first Simple Odometer System or an opt-in Smart VMT System with variable rates (**Sec. 709**). Congestion surcharge revenue returns to the metro area that generated it.

Privacy as a prerequisite (Sec. 710): pilot data barred from law enforcement or surveillance use without a court-ordered warrant; data minimization, encryption, and anonymization mandated.

THE CONCLUSION: A LEGACY OF MOBILITY

The FRAME Act, the paper concludes, is not another chapter in the long history of federal highway legislation. It is a fundamental break from a 20th-century mindset that has reached its physical, fiscal, and environmental limits. The success of the American experiment depends on the ability to move, not just vehicles, but ideas, goods, and people, with efficiency, safety, and dignity.

By centering national policy on a State of Good Repair and the Safe System Approach, the Act admits that our greatest assets are the ones we have already built, and it ends the habit of building our way out of congestion. Through the Variable Federal Cost-Share, it creates a fiscal conscience that rewards preservation and penalizes unnecessary expansion. Digital infrastructure and the National Infrastructure Data Portal end anecdotal planning: every taxpayer can see the health of their state's network on a public report card, and policy is shaped by data and accountability rather than political expediency.

Perhaps the most courageous element of the legislation is its refusal to look away from the fiscal cliff. The American VMT Choice Pilot lets the American driver lead the transition toward a solvent Highway Trust Fund, moving from a tax on consumption to a fee for access. The paper's closing question is one of legacy: a landscape of crumbling overpasses and rising fatalities, or a mobility economy that is resilient, equitable, and technologically sophisticated. The FRAME Act provides the legal architecture, the fiscal tools, and the moral clarity to rebuild America's mobility economy for the next century. It is time to stop managing decline and start engineering progress.



For the full paper and the legislation: frameformobility.org

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