



FRAME FOR MOBILITY

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Title IV, Subtitle B · Performance, Planning, and Data Modernization

A FRAME Policy Paper · The FRAME Act, Official Draft of December 15, 2025 · Sections 404–405

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PART I

THE PROBLEM

The federal transportation program has a people problem that money alone has not solved. The construction industry cannot staff the work it already has: in the 2026 Workforce Survey by the Associated General Contractors of America and NCCER, 87 percent of firms reported openings for hourly craft workers, and of firms with such openings, 88 percent said the positions were hard or harder to fill than a year earlier. Associated Builders and Contractors estimates the industry must attract 349,000 net new workers in 2026 and 456,000 in 2027, most of the 2026 demand driven by retirements. Harvard’s Joint Center for Housing Studies puts the construction trades workforce at 6.2 million in 2024, still roughly 700,000 below its pre-recession level.

The shortage is not an abstraction in a labor report; it binds project delivery directly. In the same AGC–NCCER survey, 42 percent of firms reported project delays caused by worker shortages — the single most-cited cause of delay — and half of firms reported that available candidates lack the skills, certificates, or licenses the work requires. Yet workforce sits outside the federal performance framework — neither measured as a federal outcome nor rewarded when a State improves it.

THE PROBLEM IN NUMBERS

87%

Of firms report openings for hourly craft positions (AGC–NCCER, 2026)

349,000

Net new workers needed in 2026; 456,000 in 2027 (ABC model)

42%

Of firms report delays caused by workforce shortages — the most-cited cause (AGC & NCCER)

THE PROPOSED SOLUTION

Subtitle B treats the workforce as what the delivery record shows it to be: a binding constraint on the federal program itself. Its answer is not a new federal training program. It pays States for workforce results — measured openly, reported on verified data — using the same outcome logic the rest of the title applies to pavement and safety. The proposal works in five steps.

- **A bonus, not a bureaucracy.** The federal government creates a performance bonus for state transportation workforces. No new training agency, no federal curriculum, no hiring rules. Washington buys an outcome and leaves the means to the States.
- **Three yardsticks, set in the open.** Within a year, federal officials — working with the Labor Department, state transportation departments, the construction and engineering industries, and labor organizations — publish the measures through public rulemaking. The law names three the measures must include: growth in graduates of certified trade programs, growth in active registered apprenticeships, and a shorter median time to hire for critical positions.
- **A reward large enough to matter.** A state that substantially beats its workforce targets in a given year receives, the following year, additional federal funds equal to ten percent of its main transportation apportionment. That is gubernatorial scale — large enough to command attention in a state budget, not a rounding error.
- **Free use of the reward.** Bonus money may be spent on anything the Act funds. A state that builds its workforce through trade schools keeps the freedom to spend its winnings on pavement; the incentive rewards the outcome, not a prescribed program.
- **Published proof.** Every state reports its workforce results, on verified data, in the same annual public report card that carries its safety, condition, and planning performance. Claims are public, comparable across States, and auditable on the same cycle as every other measure in the title.

Nothing in the design requires a State to run a particular program, train a particular worker, or teach a particular trade. It requires only that the results be real, measured the same way in every State, and published where anyone can check them. A State confident in its workforce keeps the full value of the bonus; a State that is not is given a priced reason to become one.

WHAT CHANGES

Workforce becomes a measured federal outcome with money attached to it. States gain a fiscal reason to build trade pipelines before the shortage reaches the project schedule, and the published results create the first comparable national dataset on state transportation workforce performance.

WHAT DOES NOT CHANGE

No federal training program, curriculum, or hiring mandate is created, and no appropriation is authorized for one. States design their own pipelines — trade programs, apprenticeships, recruitment — and answer only for the results.

THE LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL

SECTION 404 – PURPOSE AND ESTABLISHMENT

Section 404(a) states the subtitle’s three purposes: to address “the national shortage of skilled labor in the transportation construction, maintenance, and operations sectors”; to create pathways to good-paying jobs and long-term careers; and to ensure the timely and efficient delivery of the projects funded under the Act by developing a robust and qualified workforce. Section 404(b) establishes the American Infrastructure Workforce Bonus Program, “to provide a significant financial reward to States that demonstrate excellence in growing and sustaining their transportation workforce.”

SECTION 405 – METRICS, AWARD, AND REPORTING

Section 405(a) directs the Secretary, not later than one year after enactment and in consultation with the Secretary of Labor, to establish through public rulemaking “a series of clear, outcome-based performance metrics” for workforce growth, developed in consultation with State departments of transportation, the construction and engineering industries, and national labor organizations. The statute names three metrics the rule must include at a minimum: the year-over-year percentage increase in individuals graduating from certified trade programs; the increase in active registered apprenticeships; and a reduction in the median time-to-hire for critical positions.

THE AWARD

Section 405(b) sets the size of the incentive. A State that the Secretary determines has “significantly exceeded its workforce performance targets” for a fiscal year receives, in the subsequent fiscal year, additional funds equal to 10 percent of the total amount apportioned to that State under title II. Section 405(c) leaves the use of bonus funds to the State: they may be spent on any eligible activity under the Act. The design is deliberate — the federal government buys the workforce outcome and does not prescribe the local means of achieving it.

VERIFICATION

Section 405(d) closes the loop. A State reports verified data on its performance against the section 405(a) metrics in the State Infrastructure Health Report Card required under section 406 — the same public instrument that carries its safety, condition, and planning performance under subtitle C. Workforce claims are therefore published, comparable across States, and auditable on the same cycle as every other Title IV measure.

WHAT THE SUBTITLE DOES NOT DO

Subtitle B states no authorization of appropriations and creates no federal training program, curriculum, or hiring mandate. Its entire machinery is three metrics, one determination, and one percentage. Where the bill is silent — on the definition of “significantly exceeded,” which the rulemaking must supply — this paper is silent too.

THE DATA CASE

The shortage is measured from three independent directions, and they agree. The 2026 Workforce Survey by the Associated General Contractors of America and NCCER (1,830 responding firms) found 87 percent of firms holding openings for hourly craft workers and 82 percent holding openings for salaried positions; of firms with craft openings, 88 percent reported the positions as hard or harder to fill than a year earlier. Associated Builders and Contractors' workforce model — built from Census Bureau construction spending data and Bureau of Labor Statistics employment data — estimates the industry must attract 349,000 net new workers in 2026 and 456,000 in 2027, with the majority of 2026 demand attributable to retirements rather than growth. Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies reports the construction trades workforce totaled 6.2 million in 2024, still roughly 700,000 below its pre-recession level.

The constraint binds delivery, not only hiring. In the AGC–NCCER survey, 42 percent of firms reported project delays caused by shortages of their own or their subcontractors' workers — the single most-cited cause of delay — and half of firms reported that available candidates lack the skills, certificates, or licenses the work requires. That is the precise gap the bill's metrics name: certified trade program graduations measure the skills pipeline; active registered apprenticeships measure structured entry; median time-to-hire measures how long critical positions stand empty. Each statutory metric corresponds to a measured failure.

The incentive structure follows the same logic as the rest of Title IV. A 10 percent apportionment bonus is large enough to command a governor's attention and flexible enough — usable for any eligible activity — to leave States free to build the pipelines their own labor markets need, whether through trade programs, apprenticeship expansion, or recruitment. And because section 405(d) publishes verified results in the annual Report Card, the program generates, as a by-product, the first comparable national dataset on state transportation workforce performance.

Why a bonus rather than a categorical grant program? Because the failure is not a shortage of training programs — States and industry run many — but the absence of any federal signal that workforce outcomes count. A categorical program would pay for activities (courses offered, seats funded) whose connection to staffed projects is indirect. The bonus pays only for the outcome the program actually needs — more certified graduates, more apprentices, faster hiring — and the verification requirement keeps the payment honest: the money follows data the State must publish and stand behind, in the same document where its safety and condition numbers already expose it.

EVIDENCE CHECK

The survey figures are industry-collected and the ABC figures are model estimates, not counts; both are the best available instruments and are cited as what they are. There is no federal precedent for a state workforce bonus of this design — the case rests on the measured scale of the shortage and on the outcome-based structure FRAME applies throughout Title IV.



A program cannot outbuild its workforce.

Subtitle B makes workforce a measured federal outcome rather than a local hope: three outcome metrics, verified public reporting, and a 10 percent bonus for the States that grow the people the rest of the Act depends on.

SOURCES & COLOPHON

SOURCES

Legislative text: FRAME Act, Official Draft of December 15, 2025, title IV, subtitle B (Secs. 404–405); reporting cross-reference to Sec. 406 (title IV, subtitle C) as cited in the text. Associated General Contractors of America & NCCER, *2026 Workforce Survey* (September 2026) — <https://www.agc.org/news/2026/09/03/construction-workforce-shortages-remain-acute-despite-soft-market-conditions-data-centers-strain>. Associated Builders and Contractors, construction workforce model release (January 20, 2026), as published by the National Roofing Contractors Association — <https://www.nrca.net/RoofingNews/construction-must-attract-349000-new-workers-in-2026-to-meet-demand.1-20-2026.13121/details/story>. Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies, research brief on the construction trades workforce (2026), as reported by Construction Dive (October 19, 2026) — <https://www.constructiondive.com/news/immigration-crackdown-trades-workers-older-foreign/833121/>.

On the evidence: the workforce figures come from the three instruments that measure this labor market directly — the AGC–NCCER survey of 1,830 firms, the Associated Builders and Contractors model built on Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics data, and the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies’ analysis of the trades workforce. The survey figures are industry-collected and the ABC figures are model estimates; both are cited in the paper as what they are, not as official counts. No figure in this paper is drawn from the Act itself except the provisions quoted in Part III.

Within Title IV, this paper is the second of four: subtitle A (National Transportation Performance Management) sets the target-and-review framework this subtitle’s metrics plug into; subtitle C (Modernization of Transportation Planning) builds the Report Card in which workforce results are published; subtitle D (Data Architecture) sets the standard the verified reporting depends on.

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