

The Impact of the Woodall Amendment on Local Transportation Funds

The Woodall Amendment

As part of the Transportation-Housing and Urban Development title of H.R. 3354, the Make America Secure and Prosperous Appropriations Act of 2018, Congressman Woodall offered amendment #28, which was accepted by voice vote. The Woodall amendment would:

- Allow rescissions to be taken from safety funds and also from the MPO share of transportation funds; and
- Remove the requirement that rescissions be spread evenly across the various funding programs.

Consequences of the Woodall Amendment

The Woodall amendment was positioned as giving state departments of transportation more flexibility in handling rescissions, but that flexibility comes at the expense of safety and local projects and priorities. It would:

- **Pit state projects against local projects:** MPOs are not allowed to obligate projects on their own—projects that have been carefully selected to address local transportation needs. MPOs must rely on state departments of transportation to do that for them. Unfortunately, many state DOTs prioritize their own projects first for obligation, leaving locally-selected projects to wait longer for approval and construction. The Woodall amendment could incentivize further delays in obligating local projects, since states could now tap into those funds instead of their own for rescissions. It is unfair to penalize MPOs for having unobligated funds, when they must rely on state DOTs to do the obligation for them.
- **Undermine local control and local projects:** MPOs receive their transportation allocations and then move forward on selecting projects and priorities, in accordance with regional plans and input from mayors and other local leaders. The Woodall amendment would allow state DOTs to yank funds away from MPOs, without any input or consultation. This could mean that MPOs might have to cancel already -approved projects and hinders their ability to plan well.
- **Risk the safety of all Americans:** 2016 was the deadliest year on American roads in a decade, with approximately 40,000 people dying in crashes. Allowing funds to be taken out of the Highway Safety Improvement Program, which is entirely focused on reducing transportation deaths and injuries, is the wrong step to take.

Background

Federal transportation funding primarily goes to state departments of transportation, but several transportation programs sub-allocate a portion to Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). These MPOs determine which types of projects and improvements should be implemented in local communities. They know their communities' transportation needs best and can make informed decisions.

From time to time, due to financial shortfalls, Congress implements rescissions, in which some unobligated transportation funds are recalled from the states. The FAST Act set out policies guiding these rescissions, which were utilized in the FY17 rescissions, including:

- Rescissions would be proportional across the various pots of transportation funding, to ensure that no one type of funding bore the brunt of cuts.
- The MPO share of some of the transportation pots were also protected from rescissions, preventing states from pulling back funding already committed to the regions.
- Safety funds were also protected from rescissions, to ensure that funding cutbacks would not be a deterrent to saving lives.

For more information, please contact:

- Caron Whitaker, League of American Bicyclists, caron@bikeleague.org
- Katy Hartnett, PeopleForBikes, katy@peopleforbikes.org
- Margo Pedroso, Safe Routes to School National Partnership, margo@saferoutespartnership.org