



OFFICERS

**President**

James Gore  
Sonoma County

**1st Vice President**

Ed Valenzuela  
Siskiyou County

**2nd Vice President**

Chuck Washington  
Riverside County

**Past President**

Lisa A. Bartlett  
Orange County



**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Graham Knaus

April 23, 2021

**RE: CSAC INFRASTRUCTURE PRIORITIES**

Dear Members of the California Congressional Delegation:

On behalf of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), I'm writing to reiterate our association's top priorities for the upcoming infrastructure investment bill. As local communities across the nation continue the long process of recovering from the devastating economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we view this particular legislative effort as a unique opportunity for Congress to generate long-term economic growth, create jobs, modernize the nation's aging infrastructure, protect the environment, and improve the overall quality of life for Americans.

As you continue to deliberate the size and scope of the infrastructure package, we urge you to prioritize investment in the following key areas.

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION REAUTHORIZATION**

**Increase Federal Revenues for Transportation Infrastructure**

CSAC believes it is essential for Congress to provide **robust, dependable, long-term investment** in the nation's surface transportation system. Unfortunately, the revenues flowing into the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) continue to fall far short of the transportation spending authorized by Congress. The result has been numerous General Fund bailouts of the HTF, repeated delays in enacting surface transportation bills, and continual budgetary uncertainty for the state and local agencies that depend upon a predictable funding stream to plan long-term infrastructure projects.

In California, the landmark *Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017* provides over \$5 billion annually to fix local and state transportation assets and invest in transit and active transportation. At the regional level, over 80 percent of our state's residents live in a county where voters have approved a dedicated local transportation tax measure. Despite significant transportation investments at both the state and local level, California depends upon a strong federal partnership to meet our growing transportation infrastructure needs and to help fix and maintain crumbling roads and bridges.

**Restore the Highway Bridge Program**

CSAC urges Congress to **restore the Highway Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program (HBRRP)** in order to help ensure that states and local governments have additional, dedicated funding to repair and replace deficient bridges.

Bridges are a unique and vital component of our nation's transportation system. Unlike most road and pavement projects, bridge projects entail complex design processes, necessitate long-term planning and procurement, and present unique construction challenges. Moreover, there is little room for error when it comes to bridge safety, as they must remain structurally sound in order to ensure that vehicles and motorists are secure. If a bridge fails, the results are often catastrophic.

According to the American Road and Transportation Builders Association, seven percent of the bridges in California are classified as structurally deficient. All told, the state has identified needed repairs on 2,006 bridges at an estimated cost of \$8.8 billion. Although the *FAST Act* provides a funding set-aside for locally owned bridges that are located off of the Federal-aid highway system, there is no dedicated funding stream for local “on-system” bridges.”<sup>1</sup> As a result, many local on-system bridges that are in need of repair or replacement do not receive any federal support, as they must compete with a host of other highway and transit projects for limited funds.

### **FHWA Emergency Relief Program**

CSAC urges the California delegation to seek language that would **safeguard federal Emergency Relief (ER) funding for roads, bridges and key public transportation assets** that have been damaged in a major disaster. Last year’s House-passed infrastructure bill (HR 2) included Representative John Garamendi’s *Transportation Emergency Relief Funds Availability Act* (HR 3193), which would provide local transportation agencies with sufficient time under federal law to complete disaster recovery and repair work. We request that you ensure that this same language is included as part of this year’s infrastructure legislation.

By way of background, current federal regulations provide states and localities with a two-year timeframe to advance ER projects to the construction obligation stage. If a project sponsor is unable to meet the deadline – which is often the case when a jurisdiction has been impacted by a major disaster – the FHWA may provide the sponsor with additional time if “suitable justification” is presented. In 2019, the FHWA denied ER time-extension requests for a number of local transportation projects in California, which is the impetus for the requested change in law. Specifically, the aforementioned language of HR 2 would repeal FHWA’s *two-year regulatory deadline* for projects to advance to the construction phase and replace it with a new *six-year statutory limit*.

### **BROADBAND**

CSAC requests that you make **increased federal investment in broadband a top priority** for this year’s infrastructure package. As you’re aware, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought disparities in broadband access even more to the forefront, as rural parts and other underserved areas of California and the rest of the country have experienced increased demands in teleworking, E-government, virtual learning and telemedicine. The absence of adequate broadband infrastructure in rural and disadvantaged communities also severely impairs the potential for these communities to attract and retain new businesses and to improve wages and employment.

In addition, first responders serving rural areas are often at a distinct disadvantage when responding to critical incidents given a lack of reliable connectivity. Similarly, the lack of adequate broadband service limits state and local agencies’ capabilities to disseminate emergency preparedness and response information to residents and efficiently coordinate life-saving activities in the face of a disaster. Now, more than ever, federal investment is needed to help close the digital divide.

---

<sup>1</sup> In California, roughly half of the over 12,100 locally owned and maintained bridges are located on Federal-aid highways.

## **AFFORDABLE HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS**

CSAC believes there is an **urgent need for substantial affordable housing infrastructure investments** to be included as part of any effort to repair and modernize the nation's infrastructure. Without proportional affordable housing investments, there is no path for an equitable economic recovery and long-term financial stability for low- and middle-income families. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic and the compounding effects of explosive wildfires and extreme weather events in our state have further amplified the need for affordable housing in both rural and urban communities and has brought the state's escalating homelessness crisis even more to the forefront.

While several important affordable housing and homelessness bills have been introduced in recent years, they have not crossed the legislative finish line. We urge you to ensure that the forthcoming infrastructure package includes robust, long-overdue investments in key affordable housing initiatives, as well as homelessness prevention and supportive services programs.

## **WATER INFRASTRUCTURE**

CSAC strongly supports **increased investments for water supply, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure in order to protect public health and the environment.**

The effects of climate change clearly demonstrate the vulnerability of existing infrastructure and the need for resiliency. Drought, floods, fires, warming water temperatures, and other extreme weather patterns are occurring more often in California and throughout the United States and present significant challenges to the local agencies that are responsible for providing drinking and irrigation water and for managing wastewater and stormwater.

Increased federal funding and flexibility for water infrastructure will create jobs, spur investments in the economy, and provide a strong, sustainable foundation for future economic growth. Providing robust federal funding for proven programs, combined with flexibility for state implementation and management, will incentivize investment by local communities in building water infrastructure that protects public health and the environment.

Thank you for your ongoing support and partnership. As always, we look forward to continuing to work with you and your staff.

Sincerely,



Graham Knaus  
Executive Director