



Association of
Minnesota Counties

FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

2019

Transportation and Infrastructure Funding

Counties play a critical part in the nation's transportation system and should be provided levels of funding and authority that adequately reflect this role. In Minnesota alone, the County State Aid Highway System (CSAH) makes up more than 35,000 miles of roadway in the state while county roads add nearly 15,000 more. AMC supports congressional and executive branch efforts to pass a comprehensive infrastructure bill that increases funding for county-owned highways and bridges. In addition, AMC supports fully funding the Federal Transit Authority's Capital Investment Grants which assist communities in funding major transit investments such as heavy rail, commuter rail, light rail, street cars, and bus rapid transit. AMC also supports NACo's work to ensure that the federal government continues subsidies for assisting airlines serving small communities and fully fund the Essential Air Services Program.

State Assumption of the US Clean Water Act: Sec. 404 Permit Program

In 1977 Congress amended the Clean Water Act (CWA) to allow states to assume the Section 404 permitting program, which is a program established through the CWA and administered by the US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to regulate the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the US, including wetlands. Activities regulated under this program include fill for development, water resource projects, infrastructure development and mining projects. In 2015 AMC supported, and the State Legislature passed, a provision to study the feasibility of the state taking on implementation of the Section 404 permitting program. The results of the study were not favorable to assumption due to limitations on the scope of a state-assumed program, however, a recent change of interpretation by the Corps has now made assumption of the 404 program a meaningful and worthwhile option in Minnesota. Additionally, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will soon be initiating rulemaking to update the federal rules on Section 404 assumption and clarify the parameters by which states may assume jurisdiction of the program. Counties believe the time is now to proactively advocate for and pursue changes to the Federal Rules that will allow states to efficiently and effectively assume jurisdiction of this program, which will ultimately provide a more efficient and timely permitting process for local infrastructure projects and individual landowners.

County State Aid Highways and county roads make up more than 45,000 miles of roadway, totaling 33% of all state roads and highways in Minnesota.

The US Army Corps of Engineers interprets that they would retain jurisdiction over 91% of wetlands in Minnesota even if the state were granted assumption of the 404 permit program.

PRIORITIES



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Any changes to federal healthcare policy should be cognizant of potential effects on coverage and healthcare markets and not include cost shifts to state and local governments.

Stabilizing Healthcare Marketplace

Counties understand and support the need for accessible, affordable, and dependable healthcare for residents. Congressional proposals in recent years have sought to dramatically restructure and/or repeal the Affordable Care Act which would have potentially risked healthcare coverage for hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans and costs the state billions of dollars through proposals to limit or cut Medicaid expansion payments to states. AMC is also opposed to any per-capita cap or block grant proposals reforms to Medicaid that would shift additional costs to counties. Any changes to healthcare policy should be cognizant of potential effects on coverage and healthcare markets and not include cost shifts to state and local governments. Commissioners also share significant concerns on past administration-led efforts to cut federal funding to MinnesotaCare, Minnesota's basic health program that serves close to 90,000 Minnesotans each year. The 2017 decision by the Centers for Medicaid and Medicaid Services (CMS) to stop paying cost sharing reductions (CSR) to qualified health plans in addition to partially denying Minnesota's application for a 1332 State Innovation Waiver will cost Minnesota hundreds of millions of dollars over the next few years. Left undone, these actions will place undue stress on our state's budget and potentially impact funding in other vital areas. AMC supports efforts to pass legislation similar to the Bipartisan Health Care Stabilization Act of 2017 which would reverse the above described cuts to the MinnesotaCare program and improve its fiscal outlook going forth.

PRIORITIES

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ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

Broadband

AMC supports the need for border-to-border broadband infrastructure across the state. National efforts that provide tax credits to telecommunication providers and other funding mechanisms that support expanded broadband service help Minnesotans get closer to our statewide goal, particularly in underserved and unserved areas.

Preemption

AMC firmly believes in the importance of local control and community-driven decision making. State and national efforts to “preempt” local governments from making critical decisions or policy changes for their constituents are contrary to the principles of federalism and directly impact community sustainability.

Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT)/Secure Rural Schools (SRS)

A considerable percentage of land in Minnesota is owned by the federal government, as such, AMC shares the priority of NACo to support restoring the full mandatory funding for the Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program, which compensates counties for tax-exempt federal land within their boundaries. AMC and NACo also support extending the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program as a transitional funding mechanism until the federal government fully implements a sustainable long-term forest management program with adequate revenue sharing for forest counties and schools.

Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG)

AMC requests that Congress guarantee that the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) remain a separate program, separately funded from all other grants that specifically address terrorism or other specific issues (remaining, then, a truly all-hazards program), at or above current funding levels, and require that a minimum of 70 percent of EMPG funds be passed through to local government with a 50-50 match requirement. AMC continues to oppose the complete consolidation of the existing Homeland Security and Emergency Management grant programs into block grant programs.

Jail Healthcare

AMC urges the Department of Health and Human Services to adopt rules that allow pre-trial jail inmates to retain their Medicaid eligibility. Further, AMC supports legislation to permanently codify that eligibility. Inmate health care is a significant cost to counties and those that have not yet been convicted of a crime should retain their eligibility for these programs.



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ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

2019

Support for Individuals & Families

Counties are on the front line in maintaining the safety net for those unable to work, and encouraging the achievement of self-sufficiency to those who can. AMC supports increasing federal funding for and alignment among programs that assist those most in need, and encourages the maximum amount of efficiency and flexibility possible at the local level. Key federal programs that assist counties in tackling poverty include the Social Services Block Grant, the Community Services Block Grant, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Vital Communities

AMC supports federal assistance to communities in reaching their workforce and economic development potential in order to enhance the quality of life for all Minnesotans. Investments in community development, affordable housing, small/medium business development, infrastructure, job training and cleanup/redevelopment are integral to these efforts.

Census Bureau Funding

Federal funds currently allocated for the Census Bureau are insufficient in providing for the resources needed to ensure an accurate count in the next census. Population counts that are obtained from the census greatly impact federal funding allocations that go to states and counties based on formulas that use population data. As such, AMC supports an increase in funding for the Census Bureau so that an accurate, effective population count is obtained during the 2020 census.

Rural Healthcare

Counties play a critical role in providing healthcare services to citizens across the entire state of Minnesota, including those that live in more rural parts of the state. In some rural Minnesota counties, there are very limited options that exist for healthcare plans and a lack of access to care. AMC supports federal efforts to broaden healthcare access and options throughout the entire state of Minnesota. Policy and funding reforms should provide cost containment while enhancing quality care choices across the entire state and grant the maximum amount of decision-making authority and flexibility as possible to the local level.

Waters of the US (WOTUS)

Given our unique and diverse natural environment, Minnesota Counties are significantly invested in rules and regulations that impact our state's natural resources. AMC shares the belief of NACo that local streets, gutters and human-made ditches should be excluded from the definition of "Waters of the US" under the federal Clean Water Act. As WOTUS is being reexamined, AMC urges Congress and the Administration along with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to rewrite this rule in consultation and collaboration with state and local governments.