



**NEW DIRECTION IN TRANSPORTATION POLICY:
AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST'S VISION FOR CHANGE**

The federal government's Transportation Bill governs federal surface transportation spending and has a dramatic impact on the nation's economy and its natural resources. Reauthorized every five years and spending hundreds of billions of dollars over its life, the Transportation Bill affects state and local land-use patterns and the distribution of goods and products. Federal transportation policy profoundly affects the nation's food system and its agricultural resources, and contributes to the conversion of precious agricultural land to roads and other infrastructure. However, the bill's impacts on agricultural land and the food and farming system receive little attention. American Farmland Trust (AFT) seeks to change this dynamic, by working to ensure that the next Transportation Bill recognizes the value of our nation's farms and ranches to our food and energy security and the burgeoning farmer and consumer interest in rebuilding regional food distribution networks and infrastructure.

With a new Administration and change in the air, we believe this is a golden opportunity to make changes in transportation and infrastructure policy. We join with several organizations in recommending that the next Transportation Bill support a "greener" transportation infrastructure that protects valuable natural resources and reduces the distance that food needs to travel from field to fork. AFT suggests the following proposals to further that end.

1. Reduce the conversion of productive farm and ranch land through federal transportation and infrastructure projects. The federal government is one of the most significant contributors to the conversion of productive farm and ranchland to non-agricultural uses by financing highway, transportation and infrastructure projects that take prime and unique farmland out of agricultural production forever. AFT proposes to:
 - o Include prime and unique farm and ranchland in the list of land covered by Section 4(f) (as amended and codified in 49 U.S.C. §303 of the USDOT Act of 1966). Currently, federally funded transportation projects that impact specific types of properties listed in Section 4(f) must undergo a formal evaluation and approval process. Under Section 4(f), the Secretary of Transportation may approve a transportation project that will impact 4(f) properties only if there is no prudent and feasible alternative to using that land, and if, in using that land, the project minimizes the impact on the property. Including prime and unique farm and ranchland in the list of Section 4(f) properties would ensure that

transportation projects do not unnecessarily destroy the nation's most fertile and productive agricultural lands.

- o Include land that is protected in perpetuity by an agricultural conservation easement on the Section 4(f) list. Every year, state and local governments, in addition to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, spend millions of dollars to permanently protect tens of thousands of acres of agricultural land through the purchase of agricultural conservation easements. Federal transportation dollars should not be used to convert these protected properties unless a compelling case can be made for their conversion. Including protected agricultural land on the Section 4(f) list will ensure that federal funds are not used to vitiate previous public investments in agricultural land protection.
 - o Expand the Transportation Enhancement Program to specifically provide funding for farmland protection. Currently, enhancement funds only may be used to protect farmland if the land has other recognized attributes, such as historic or scenic qualities. Allowing the use of enhancement funds specifically for farmland protection, however, would provide a pot of "mitigation" funding to be used to protect remaining farmland in states or regions where federally funded transportation projects have led to the loss of significant agricultural resources.
2. Establish a pilot program to expand regional food distribution and processing capabilities. Around the country, consumers, food distributors, local governments and private and public institutions are working to expand the availability and accessibility of local food. Public concerns about emergency preparedness, rising fuel costs, air quality and the environmental costs of shipping food long distances, and the growing demand for locally grown food are becoming priorities transportation planning.

Federal transportation policy can be an important catalyst to help stimulate the revitalization of local and regional food systems. Such a program could leverage state, local and private resources to conduct foodshed assessments, expand regional food distribution facilities and public markets, increase off-season storage capacity, restore rail lines for agricultural use, build regional transportation networks and encourage virtual marketing.

The opportunities for connecting farmers and consumers have never been greater; a small strategic federal investment in local and regional agricultural infrastructure projects through the Transportation Bill would not only increase farm profitability and stimulate job growth but would help to address climate change by strengthening regional food systems and reducing food miles traveled.

3. Support smart growth provisions in the Transportation for America platform such as emphasizing shovel ready maintenance and repair vs building new highways.