

POLICY STATEMENT ON CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

June 2011

The United States Department of Transportation (DOT) shall integrate consideration of climate change impacts and adaptation into the planning, operations, policies, and programs of DOT in order to ensure that taxpayer resources are invested wisely and that transportation infrastructure, services and operations remain effective in current and future climate conditions. The climate is changing and the transportation sector needs to prepare for its impacts. Through climate change adaptation efforts, the transportation sector can adjust to future changes, minimize negative effects and take advantage of new opportunities. Accordingly, DOT modal administrations shall incorporate consideration of climate adaptation into their planning processes and investment decisions. DOT encourages State, regional and local transportation agencies to consider climate change impacts in their decision-making, as well.

The DOT policy is to incorporate climate adaptation strategies into its transportation missions, programs, and operations. Climate change adaptation is a critical complement to mitigation efforts to address the causes and consequences of climate change. Every modal administration has the responsibility to consider climate change impacts on current systems and future investments. Furthermore, planning for climate adaptation assists State and local transportation agencies, and DOT, to identify how climate change is likely to impact their ability to achieve their mission, continue operations, and to meet policy and program objectives. Therefore, DOT agencies will develop, prioritize, implement, and evaluate actions to moderate climate risks and protect critical infrastructure using the best available science and information.

This policy is based on Executive Order (E.O.) 13514 – *Federal Leadership in Environmental, Energy, and Economic Performance*. The E.O. includes direction to address climate adaptation planning. Additionally, the Secretary of Transportation has authority under 49 United States Code (U.S.C.) Section 322 – General Powers. This Policy is effective immediately and will remain in effect until it is amended, superseded, or revoked. This Policy does not alter or affect any existing duty or authority of individual components or Offices.

In implementing this Policy, DOT will adhere to the following guiding principles.

Guiding Principles for Climate Change Adaptation


- **Adopt integrated approaches.** Climate change adaptation strategies should be integrated into core policies, planning, practices, and programs.
- **Prioritize the most vulnerable.** Adaptation plans should prioritize helping people, places, and infrastructure that are most vulnerable to climate impacts. They should also be designed and implemented with meaningful involvement from all parts of society. Issues of inequality and environmental justice associated with climate change impacts and adaptation should be addressed.
- **Use best-available science.** Adaptation should be grounded in best-available scientific understanding of climate change risks, impacts, and vulnerabilities. Adaptive actions should not be delayed to wait for a complete understanding of climate change impacts, as there will always be some uncertainty. Plans and actions should be adjusted as our understanding of climate impacts increases.
- **Build strong partnerships.** Adaptation requires coordination across multiple sectors, geographical scales, and levels of government and should build on the existing efforts and knowledge of a wide range of stakeholders. Because impacts, vulnerability, and needs vary by region and locale, adaptation will be most effective when driven by local or regional risks and needs.
- **Apply risk-management methods and tools.** A risk management approach can be an effective way to assess and respond to climate change because the timing, likelihood, and nature of specific climate risks are difficult to predict. Risk management approaches are already used in many critical decisions today (e.g., for fire, flood, disease outbreaks), and can aid in understanding the potential consequences of inaction as well as options for risk reduction.
- **Apply ecosystem-based approaches.** Ecosystems provide valuable services that help to build resilience and reduce the vulnerability of people and their livelihoods to climate change impacts. Integrating the protection of biodiversity and ecosystem services into adaptation strategies will increase resilience of human and natural systems to climate and non-climate risks, providing benefits to society and the environment.
- **Maximize mutual benefits.** Adaptation should, where possible, use strategies that complement or directly support other related climate or environmental initiatives, such as efforts to improve disaster preparedness, promote sustainable resource management, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions including the development of cost-effective technologies.
- **Continuously evaluate performance.** Adaptation plans should include measurable goals and performance metrics to continuously assess whether adaptive actions are achieving desired outcomes. In some cases, the measurements will be qualitative until more information is gathered to evaluate outcomes quantitatively. Flexibility is critical to building a robust and resilient process that can accommodate uncertainty and change.

Each modal administration within DOT shall, in a manner consistent and compatible with its mission:

- Analyze how climate change may impact its ability to achieve its mission, policy, program, and operation objectives.
- Report annually on its accomplishments in implementing climate adaption strategies.
- Coordinate actions with the Senior Official responsible for implementing climate adaptation and the Center for Climate Change Steering Committee member.
- Implement climate change adaptation implementing instructions issued by CEQ.

The Counselor to the Secretary (in her capacity as DOT's Senior Sustainability Officer) and designated modal executives are responsible for ensuring implementation of this Policy supported by the Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy and the DOT Center for Climate Change.

The climate is changing and will impact the U.S. transportation system. Efforts are already underway at the Federal level and in some States and local areas, but more needs to be done. DOT will encourage efforts to ensure a transportation infrastructure that is resilient to climate impacts; however success will depend on the whole transportation sector embracing and implementing this policy.



Ray LaHood