



Transportation Infrastructure Funding Advocacy Guide

August 2016

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In recent years, several AGC Chapters and AGC of America have managed successful transportation infrastructure advocacy campaigns that have achieved increased funding for projects in regions, states, and across the country. This document serves to provide details on the chapters' efforts and guidance to chapters interested in pursuing similar programs.

This guide examines campaigns managed by the following:

Constructors Association of Western Pennsylvania

AGC of South Dakota

AGC of Iowa

AGC of America

All three chapters and AGC of America achieved an increase in funding to support improvements to roads and bridges. While each took a slightly different approach to its success, there were several similarities:

1. *Funding increases were the result of a multi-year effort.*

Each chapter worked over several years to achieve funding increases, which meant many years of work and financial commitments. Often, they maintained direct lobbying efforts year over year, even when it was clear that a funding increase would not be possible in the current election year. This was useful in maintaining relationships and remaining present in the consciousness of legislators. In some cases, laying this groundwork paid off very quickly when a supportive Governor became vocal on the issue.

2. *Gubernatorial (or other political heavy-hitter) support played a vital role in success.*

Most chapters worked closely with the Governor's office. The Governor's vocal support for increased transportation funding often helped garner public and legislative support for funding bills. In some cases, the chapter had to conduct research or make other preparations in order to demonstrate the investment was necessary to the success of the state, and that it would be a positive legacy for the Governor.

3. *Broad-based coalitions were most effective in changing public opinion and garnering legislative support.*

Every successful campaign was run in part by a coalition. The coalitions varied in size and scope, but they showed the public and legislators that there were many organizations (representative of thousands of constituents) that valued infrastructure investment. Generally coalitions included the local Chamber of Commerce, other business groups, trucking and related transportation

organizations, as well as travel and tourism organizations, AARP, and environmental groups. Often the Chapter took the lead in organizing the coalition and events to support the message, which are outlined in each case study below.

While these campaigns share similar tactics, the messaging varied. Some emphasized the construction jobs that infrastructure projects deliver to the overall economy, while others focused on safe and efficient travel. Still others argued that effective transportation systems attract businesses and improve the economy. All campaign managers that contributed to this report emphasized that each campaign must be tailored to the needs in the state or region because the results need to be tangible. Campaigns must be nimble, and the chapter must be willing to make adjustments as needed. For example, some campaigns saw value in gaining support from families, particularly mothers of young children, and focused on safe transport. Other campaigns strictly targeted legislators. These distinctions were drawn on detailed research and polling to determine where support was lacking.

Once the target audience(s) was identified, the chapter, in collaboration with a coalition, focused on providing detailed, relevant information. This was often done in collaboration with the state Department of Transportation, or other highway transportation organizations, to show how funding would benefit the region. Most campaigns benefited from educating voters and legislators and demonstrating the benefits that would come with increased funding.

Overall, social media proved to be a useful tool in disseminating the campaign message, but this was only after a carefully cultivated message was developed, based on detailed research.

Steps to a Successful Transportation Funding Campaign:

1. Maintain a consistent effort and funding. Stay in contact with legislators and provide regular examples of how a well-funded infrastructure program benefits the state or region.
2. Create an appetite for the solution. Messaging, lobbying, and coalitions stress the positive, create a definable need, and establish an appetite for politicians and the public to find a solution.
3. Gather partners. Join or create a coalition of like-minded groups that will support and sustain a long-term campaign. This coalition may grow and change as the message is developed in later steps. In order to garner the most support, it should be as broad-based as possible, while remaining effective.
4. Do your homework. Conduct research on voter sentiment to develop a campaign message. In order to develop a successful campaign message, the chapter needs to figure out the message that will resonate. Concerns often center on jobs and safety, but there may be other factors at play.
5. Be disciplined and focused. Make sure your best arguments are always front and center.
6. Develop a website with relevant information that will support the desired message. Utilize resources from the Department of Transportation, The Road Information Program (TRIP), and other relevant organizations that will support the coalition's efforts.
7. Disseminate the message, both to the legislature and public. Research may show that one or the other audience is more important, but while the chapter garners public support, there should be a concurrent effort to develop effective legislation. The messaging may appear in a variety of ways (examples are shown in the following case studies):
 - a. Print and digital marketing – helps show the longevity of the campaign
 - b. Television advertising – demonstrates financial backing of the campaign
 - c. Social media – shows innovation and interest in young voters)
 - d. Giveaways and gifts bearing the campaign message – creates buzz and expands the coalition)
 - e. Payroll stuffers – shows employees have a vested interest in helping the industry)
 - f. Form letters from constituents to legislators – make it easy to show support
 - g. Face-to-face meetings with decision makers – site visits show the impact of the business

Case Studies

[Constructors Association of Western Pennsylvania](#)

[Associated General Contractors of South Dakota](#)

[Associated General Contractors of Iowa](#)

[Associated General Contractors of America](#)

Constructors Association of Western Pennsylvania

The Constructors Association of Western Pennsylvania is a trade association representing union-affiliated contractors in the heavy, highway, railroad and utility construction industry in western Pennsylvania since 1934. In November 2013, as part of a broad-based coalition of organizations and associations, they achieved a transportation funding bill that included the first increase since 1997.

The chapter recognized that it must gain widespread support for transportation funding in order to achieve success. Their effort required support from many stakeholders, including business groups, other transportation groups, individuals, such as technicians and engineers.

Potential Roadblocks

In Pennsylvania, there were several hurdles to overcome. They needed to assess the battlefield to identify a plausible path forward. First, the Republican Governor, House, and Senate, including Majority Leader, were all against tax increases. As a result, it was unlikely the Majority Leader would bring a measure to the floor, so the chapter needed to find a different sponsor for a funding bill.

Messaging

The messaging was designed to 1) garner support from residents, which would result in a positive vote in the state legislature; 2) put pressure on legislators to act for the good of the state's economy.

Well-funded transportation results in a better quality of life.

Residents require reliable and safe transportation. Unsafe roads and bridges put all users at risk, increase congestion, and reduce quality of life.

Transportation investment attracts business and grows jobs.

Generally the argument is low taxes attract business, but more transportation investment attracts business. Efficient transportation means it is easier and less expensive to move products, which is appealing to business owners and investors. These are job creators for the region.

Tactics

Participate closely with Governor.

The Governor's Transportation Funding Advisory Commission met for five months in 2011, to develop [recommendations](#) to improve transportation infrastructure. The Chapter Executive participated on the commission, however it was two years before the governor acted on its recommendations. The Commission identified \$4.7 billion in need, but recommended \$2.5 billion.

Work as part of a broad-based coalition.

The chapter worked through the Keystone Transportation Funding Coalition, which included: Highway construction industry; public transportation agencies; labor unions; farm organizations; AARP; bicycle and pedestrian advocates; land-use advocates; AAA; air and seaport organizations; local government associations; Chambers of Commerce; travel and tourism organizations; environmental advocates; health care organizations; freight and passenger rail organizations; and the trucking industry.

Give job creators a voice.

Present business owners who say that they look at surrounding transportation when they look for places to invest. This motivates politicians who want to grow business in their region. By including business organizations and job creators in the Keystone Transportation Funding Coalition, and with their participation in Coalition events, the economic argument for improved transportation was stronger.

Find the best argument for the chapter.

CAWP represents union-affiliated contractors. The chapter created the Labor Management Coalition, which included chapter members (all union) and management, which was showcased at a successful Labor Day media event. By placing labor and management together, the chapter demonstrated the importance of transportation funding to both parties, as this was a big enough issue to put disagreements aside.

Utilize local Department of Transportation.

The state Department of Transportation weight-restricted many bridges in the region due to safety concerns. The Secretary of Transportation held special events to explain the need for weight restrictions and related safety concerns.

DOT created an online map that allowed users to see how transportation funding would be put to use to improve commutes across the region. This also identified many bridges users did not recognize as bridges, raising awareness of safety concerns. CAWP shared this map with members and encouraged them to share it with friends and family.

Use social media.

The chapter commissioned a [one-minute video](#) showing families at risk traveling on unsafe roads and bridges. It was pushed out on social media (i.e. Facebook and Twitter) in September when children were returning to school and bridges were weight restricted, on the heels of Labor Day media event. The chapter relied on coalition and chapter members to share the video and other posts on social media.

Successful Event

Labor Day jobs

Beneath a weight restricted Pittsburgh bridge on Labor Day 2013, labor officials, AGC officials, and local and Pennsylvania Chamber of Commerce representatives gave remarks in support of

Act 89. This was particularly effective because these groups are often at odds. The media appreciate the unique perspective given by each representative.

Key points:

- An estimated 1,400 people working for Pittsburgh area construction firms and their suppliers will lose their jobs
- Pennsylvania Department of Transportation will be forced to reduce highway funding by \$500 million next year due to failure to pass a measure that would have provided \$1.9 billion a year for road and bridge repairs.
- Statewide highway funding cuts will amount to roughly 7,200 lost jobs for Pennsylvania's construction contractors and their suppliers

[Sample press release.](#)

Results

Act 89 passed in November 2013, invests an additional \$2.3 to \$2.4 billion into transportation over five years. The bill eliminated the 12 cents per gallon state retail gas and retail tax, and offset the loss by uncapping the Oil Company Franchise Tax (OCFT), a tax on gas and diesel at the wholesale level, which had been artificially capped at \$1.25. In addition, the bill increases fees for vehicle registration and licenses. The act also increased resources for a fund for non-highway modes' capital needs. [Details.](#)

Associated General Contractors of South Dakota

AGC of South Dakota is the Highway Heavy Utilities Chapter of AGC in the state. Its membership includes contractors, as well as supply and service firms. The chapter was formed in 1935, when it was incorporated as the "Highway Construction Industry of South Dakota, Inc." It then joined the AGC of America in 1944 and later became the AGC of South Dakota. In 2015, the chapter achieved an \$85 billion increase in transportation funding. It was the first increase in funding in the state since 1998.

Potential Roadblocks

Generally, the public is against any tax increase. One of the first tasks the chapter set was to garner support for improving the state's infrastructure, which included a gas tax increase.

The Governor was fiscally conservative and originally against a gas tax increase. The chapter was able to persuade him that voters were demanding the investment. In his second term, the Governor became a vocal supporter of a funding increase.

Messaging

Roads are vital.

This messaging was developed based on feedback from the public via a public poll. This messaging, including how transportation systems impact the economy and safety, was used consistently across all components of the campaign, including print collateral, regional digital marketing, and the coalition website. The chapter contracted with a web development and digital advertising agency on the campaign.

South Dakota Department of Transportation testimony.

The SDDOT provided testimony to the state legislature to explain the necessity of investing in the state's roads and bridges.

Tactics

Gather information on voter sentiment.

The chapter was able to garner support from the governor thanks in part to the results of a phone poll it commissioned in March 2013. It found that residents of South Dakota were willing to pay for improved roads.

The chapter also organized the 2014 Highway Needs and Financing Study Committee, which served to help 15 legislators further explore public opinion on transportation funding. The Committee organized town hall meetings in eight communities, which allowed the public to express their opinions directly to legislators.

This information regarding voter sentiment was crucial to garnering support from legislators and the Governor.

Work as part of a coalition.

The chapter created the Roads Are Vital coalition, which included highway user groups and other construction-related associations. While some building contractors did not stand to gain anything in this effort, they joined the coalition in solidarity with AGC.

Provide useful information to the public and legislators.

Roadsarevital.org included valuable information from the South Dakota Department of Transportation and TRIP on the state's deteriorating roads and bridges. This website was advertised as part of the campaign, via digital and television ads, and media events.

Provide tools to garner support.

The coalition created and distributed a variety of materials to disseminate its message, including Digi-clean cleaners for phones and other electronic devices, and payroll stuffers contractors used to inform employees. The Roadsarevital.org website also allowed for users to automatically send messages of support for transportation funding to their legislators.

Maintain relationships.

The chapter hosts a dinner each February to introduce new legislators to the construction industry. This allows the chapter to cultivate relationships with all legislators and provides an opportunity to showcase the benefits of supporting the construction industry in the state.

Results

On March 13, 2015, the legislature passed Senate Bill 1, which included \$85 billion in transportation funding. The bill included six cent gas tax, and license plate fee increases.

Associated General Contractors of Iowa

The Associated General Contractors of Iowa is an organization of qualified construction contractors and industry related companies. This AGC of America chapter had been working toward an adjustment in the Iowa gas tax since 2008, when several fee increases were enacted. While the chapter was grateful for the fee increases, it did not meet funding needs, and the chapter anticipated consistently returning to Congress for a gas tax increase. And they did - for seven years.

Potential roadblocks

Politically, it was evident that a gas tax increase was not going to be possible in 2014. The chapter argued that fee increases would not provide the necessary funding, using studies that had previously led to fee increases in 2008, but to no avail.

Messaging

We can't afford to wait.

This message was developed to appeal mainly to mothers with young children, and was developed and confirmed via polling (see below).

Poorly maintained transportation infrastructure is unsafe.

In order to appeal to this demographic and to garner support for a gas tax to fund highway transportation, the chapter relied on evidence that poorly maintained highways and bridges were a threat to safety.

Tactics

Work with the Governor and Department of Transportation.

The Iowa governor confided to the chapter that a gas tax increase would be addressed after the election year, in 2014. After the governor was re-elected, the chapter rolled out a media campaign that was balanced and supported with stepped-up rhetoric from the governor's office.

The chapter worked closely with the state Department of Transportation, which worked as an active voice to establish the need for increased funding.

Use polling to develop effective messaging and be disciplined about delivering that message.

The chapter conducted two polls. The first was to determine the types of messages that might be effective; the second was to determine if the chosen method was effective in moving their targeted demographic, mothers with young children. Polling found voters had a poor opinion of the condition of the state's roads and bridges; however, there was mixed support for increased funding.

Use targeted ads.

Working through the Iowa Good Roads Association, the chapter ran a television ad showing a school bus passing over a structurally deficient bridge, using safety concerns to move their targeted demographic. The television ad played through the election and while children were in school.

Sample television ads:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bteZ9UFBzm0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WyUSJIN6wSs>

The chapter also utilized digital ads, as shown here:

SUPPORT OUR ROADS AND BRIDGES.
Paid for by the Iowa Good Roads Association. >> Click here for more information.

WE CAN'T AFFORD TO WAIT.
Help your neighbors. Fund the roads.

Lobby legislators throughout the election cycle.

Despite low support for a gas tax increase in an election year, the chapter maintained relationships and continued lobbying efforts throughout the cycle. It was important to lay the groundwork to move quickly when the election was over. The chapter sent this mailer to Senators:

CRITICAL FUNDING SHORTAGE

DON'T LET THE UNTHINKABLE HAPPEN.

- We are all at risk.
- 5,000 Iowa bridges are structurally deficient - if legislators fail to act this year, our roads get even worse.

Tell your Senator to support funding for our roads and bridges... before it's too late!

This is what a **NO** vote means in lost road funds for the cities and counties in this district:

- Clarke County (and its cities): \$547,713
- Decatur County (and its cities): \$690,502
- Jasper County (and its cities): \$1,468,036
- Lucas County (and its cities): \$555,715
- Marion County (and its cities): \$1,212,302
- Wayne County (and its cities): \$596,136

Source: Iowa Department of Transportation

Call your Senator today and encourage them to support funding to fix our crumbling roads and bridges!

Senator Amy Sinclair
District 14
515-281-3371
amy.sinclair@legis.iowa.gov

100 Court Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50309

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MAILED FROM
ZIP CODE 50316
PERMIT NO. 384

facebook.com/WeCantAffordtoWait @IowaGoodRoads

Paid for by the Iowa Good Roads Assn.

Results

In 2015, the legislature passed a ten cent gas tax increase - the first since 1989.

Associated General Contractors of America

The Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) is the leading association for the construction industry. AGC represents more than 26,000 firms, including over 6,500 of America's leading general contractors, and over 9,000 specialty-contracting firms. More than 10,500 service providers and suppliers are also associated with AGC, all through a nationwide network of chapters. AGC advocates on behalf of its members across several types of commercial construction, including highway and transportation. Over the course of six years, AGC and its partners in the Transportation Construction Coalition (TCC) and Americans for Transportation Mobility (ATM) worked consistently delivered the message to Congress that highway transportation funding was a worthy investment.

Potential Roadblocks

Federal transportation funding bills do not have the added benefit states enjoy of pointing to specific projects to show value and improved quality of life. Conservatives on television were complaining that highway funds are wasted, and the effectiveness of funding in the stimulus package were disparaged as wasteful, creating only temporary jobs. Intense partisanship made bipartisan bills harder to pass, and the president was not willing to invest political capital to get a big bill passed. Investment on the federal level can become an abstract idea. AGC worked to overcome these problems by using the messaging outlined below.

Some in Congress proposed to cut funding to only what the existing trust fund revenues could support, rather than seeking additional funding. There was also a concerted effort to end the federal program and turn the entire program over to the states.

Messaging

Transportation funding equals jobs.

AGC hosted media events across the country to show the media and legislators that a depleted highway fund meant lost jobs. Halted transportation construction projects or a lack thereof resulted in not only losses for the contractor; it also meant layoffs and reduced spending at area businesses that would be patronized by firm employees.

Jobs improve lives for Americans across the country.

AGC's messaging worked to demonstrate that highway funding guaranteed jobs, which meant mother's and father's had jobs they could rely on and regular, reliable income.

Faster and safer commutes.

The Americans for Transportation Mobility used this message in its campaign to garner support from Americans across the country. This message gave all voters a stake in transportation funding because it showed them that their support would ultimately provide faster, safer commutes, thanks to more efficient transportation and structurally-sound, well-maintained roads and bridges.

Tactics

Seek bipartisan support.

AGC identified a strong, committed political champion, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), who teamed up with senior Republican Jim Inhofe (R-OK) and senior Democrat Barbara Boxer (D-CA) to push the Senate to act. Overwhelming, bipartisan Senate action forced the House to take the bill seriously.

Work as part of a broad-based coalition.

The [Americans for Transportation Mobility Coalition](#) is a collaborative effort with the Chamber of Commerce that encourages business, labor, transportation stakeholders and concerned citizens to advocate for improved and increased federal investment in the nation's aging and overburdened transportation system. They believe the deterioration of the nation's transportation system undermines the economy, jeopardizes our safety, threatens quality of life, and harms the environment. They called on elected officials must take action to repair, rebuild and revitalize the nation's roads, bridges and public transportation systems. AGC also sought out other allies, including ports, manufacturers, truckers, and state DOTs, and organized informal coalitions to share information, combine on strategy, and make sure support was as broad as possible.

AHRI also gathered the usual suspects. The Transportation Construction Coalition (TCC) is a partnership of 31 national construction related associations and construction unions representing hundreds of thousands of individuals with a direct market interest in federal transportation programs. Established in July 1996 and co-chaired by the [American Road & Transportation Builders Association](#) (ARTBA) and the Associated General Contractors (AGC) of America, the TCC focuses on federal budget and surface transportation program policy issues. TCC activists can be found in virtually every congressional district and provide a vital service to their communities by helping to improve the efficiency and safety of America's transportation infrastructure. Together they manage Hardhats for Highways, an online advocacy tool that allows users to learn more about transportation funding, write their representatives in support of transportation funding legislation, and engage their employees to meet with Representatives and Senators in their home district and states.

Be consistent and persistent.

AGC organized numerous activities to keep highway funding front and center in Congress, including a push on three occasions for House members to send letters seeking a solution. AGC used the two months between the 2012 election and the New Year to educate newly-elected members of the House, and visited all offices to ask them to sign on to a bipartisan letter stating that funding for the transportation bill should be a priority. AGC staged annual fly-ins with their members, and provided members with the latest information and a solid message to use with legislators in their district.

AGC issues a monthly press release on job growth in the construction industry. This provided a steady drum beat of the importance of a well-funded highway bill, as Congress could either continue to support job growth in the construction industry, or diminish it. [Example.](#)

Use direct advocacy methods.

The Hardhats for Highways component to this campaign was critical, as it allowed supporters a simple way to send letters directly to their legislators and provided direction on how to have an effective in person meeting with their Representative and Senators. AGC and its coalition partners also provided advocacy tools, such as payroll stuffers or news for company newsletters, to contractors, to garner support from their employees. Employees had a strong stake because approved highway funding would provide more job security. AGC and its partners regularly provided new draft letters and messages for supporters to use in their advocacy. This was critical, as very active supporters were willing to write their legislators again and again, provided content was available.

Sample form letter:

The passage of the FAST Act was incredibly important to my company and my industry and I thank Congress for passing such an important bill.

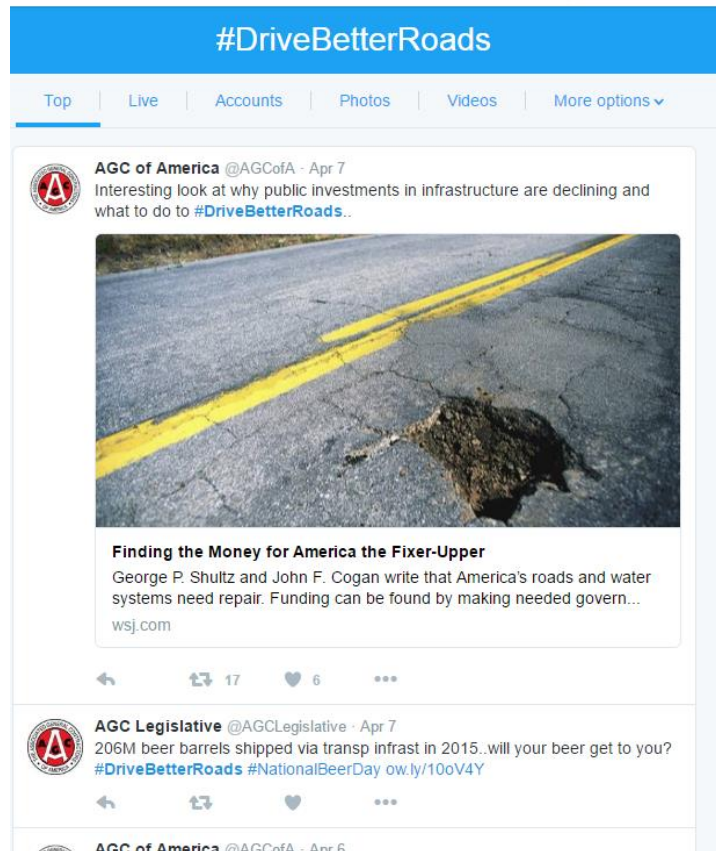
Unfortunately, our work is not done. While the FAST Act provided 5 years of funding certainty, it failed to identify a permanent fix for the Highway Trust Fund. If Congress fails to act on such a fix before the FAST Act expires we will once again be faced with relying on General Fund transfers or face serious cuts in our transportation programs.

In order to avoid that scenario your colleagues Representatives Sam Graves (R-MO) and Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-District of Columbia) are circulating a letter to the Ways & Means Committee asking them to consider finding a permanent fix for the Highway Trust Fund as part any tax reform proposal.

Please show your continued to support to our industry and sign the bipartisan Graves/Holmes Norton letter. Now is the time to begin the discussion on how we fix the Highway Trust Fund not when it is too late.

This letter was sent through the Transportation Construction Coalition's "Hardhats for Highways" campaign.

AGC of America also maintained a #DriveBetterRoads campaign, in addition to Hardhats for Highways. DriveBetterRoads.org offered drivers additional details on the benefits of infrastructure investment, and an online petition they could sign urging Congress to pass a funding bill. Targeted digital advertising and social media drove traffic to the site and raised awareness among commuters and Congress. The hashtag #DriveBetterRoads and messaging on Twitter allowed AGC of America to pool efforts with fellow funding supporters, including other coalitions, Members of Congress, and thought leaders.



Directly lobby.

AGC maintained a consistent and active presence in the House and Senate offices over the seven years of short-term extensions and Highway Trust Fund bailouts. Maintaining a strong bipartisan level of support for federal highway and transit programs was critical to stave off any attempt to devolve the programs or cut funding. AGC used its legislative fly-ins to focus on the need for Congress to act on a long-term, well-funded bill, and even brought in several CEOs from the country's largest transportation construction firms to meet directly with key Congressional Representatives and Senators. This meant that AGC was well-positioned to be successful when it was it time pass a long-term bill and secure the funding necessary to pay for it.

Results

At the end of 2015, Congress passed the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. The five-year bill provides 15 percent and 21 percent growth for highway and transit capital programs, respectively, from current investment levels. The bill was funded mainly through a surplus in the Federal Reserve and did not require a gas tax increase. While AGC celebrated the passage of this bill, they continue to advocate for a long-term sustainable solution to the structural imbalance that has plagued the Highway Trust Fund since 2008. They are still hopeful of achieving an increase in the gas tax, and are considering other user pay-related options to fund the Highway Trust Fund.