

July 15, 2015

The Honorable John Thune  
Chair, Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Thune,

We write to thank you for your strong support of the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) in S. 1732, the Comprehensive Transportation and Consumer Protection Act of 2015. The bill recognizes the importance of timely, accurate, and objective statistical data to informing wise decision making. It also recognizes the importance of BTS having sole control over its budget, publications, and information technology (IT) to ensure its products are perceived as objective and credible. We strongly support these provisions (Section 1306) and urge they be incorporated into final transportation legislation.

Transportation is integral to our economy and country, from households to businesses to government. It makes up 18 percent of consumer spending. Large corporations and small businesses alike rely on our nation's transportation infrastructure for its personnel, clients and customers and the delivery and distribution of products and supplies. Similarly, state, local and federal governments rely on the transportation infrastructure for safety, economic development, delivery of services, and workforce access.

Given the importance of transportation to our economy and the costs of maintaining our transportation infrastructure, having comprehensive, credible, and objective statistical data on our transportation system is critical. It will ensure taxpayer money is spent wisely and improve our economic competitiveness.

The BTS budget, publication, and IT autonomy provisions of S. 1732 help ensure the country's transportation decisions are informed by statistical data that are trusted by the public to be objective, valid, and reliable. As a letter recently signed by 20 former statistical agency heads states, "All sides of a policy debate should be able to look to the statistical data as objective and high quality. Any perception that the data have been influenced by a partisan perspective undermines the policy making and its administration." The importance of a federal statistical agency having sole control over its budget, publications, and IT are well recognized in the recently issued OMB Statistical Policy Directive #1, "Fundamental Responsibilities of Federal Statistical Agencies and Recognized Statistical Units," and in the National Academy of Sciences' *Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency* (fifth edition, 2013). With

BTS's move in FY15 to the Office of the Secretary, it is also important that these controls be enacted by Congress in transportation legislation.

While we understand the budget authorizations for BTS are beyond the scope of this bill, our letter would be incomplete without discussing it. The BTS budget has been stagnant for the past ten years. Indeed, its FY15 budget is the same as the FY05 budget, \$26 million, thereby eroding BTS of 20 percent of its purchasing power. We also understand the now-defunct Research and Innovation Technology Administration used significant portions of BTS's authorized Highway Trust Fund (HTF) funding for its operations, further diminishing BTS's operations. As a result of BTS's constrained budget, the intercity passenger travel survey has not been done since 1995 and the vehicle inventory and use survey since 2002, forcing policy makers to make decisions on multi-billion dollar projects on outdated data. For these reasons, twenty organizations signed onto a letter early this year in support of the President's FY16 Budget of \$29 million for BTS with inflationary increases for the out-years. (See enclosure.) We again urge these levels be incorporated into final transportation legislation. We also believe the budget autonomy provisions of S. 1732 will help BTS to allocate more of its authorized HTF funding to resuming these very important surveys and undertaking new projects.

Thank you for your legislation recognizing and ensuring the importance of BTS to informing sound and cost-efficient transportation policymaking.

AAA

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety  
American Association for Public Opinion Research  
American Society of Civil Engineers  
American Statistical Association  
Association of Academic Survey Research Organizations  
Association of Public Data Users  
Consortium of Social Science Associations  
Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics  
Institute for Transportation and Development Policy  
National Association for Business Economics  
Surface Transportation Policy Partnership  
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Enclosure: Letter of support for FY16 BTS request.

February 27, 2015

The Honorable William Shuster  
Chairman, Transportation and Infrastructure  
Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Thune  
Chair, Committee on Commerce, Science and  
Transportation  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Peter A. DeFazio  
Ranking Member, Transportation and  
Infrastructure Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Barbara Boxer  
Ranking Member, Committee on Environment  
and Public Works  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James Inhofe  
Chair, Committee on Environment and Public  
Works  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Nelson  
Ranking Member, Committee on Commerce,  
Science and Transportation  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Inhofe, Chair Shuster, Chair Thune, Ranking Member Boxer, Ranking Member DeFazio, and Ranking Member Nelson,

As you consider authorization bills for surface transportation, the undersigned groups encourage you to boost funding for the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) to the level requested under the President's FY16 Budget of \$29 million with inflationary increases for the out-years. The BTS budget has been stagnant for the past ten years. Indeed, its FY15 budget is the same as the FY05 budget, \$26 million, thereby eroding BTS of 20 percent of its purchasing power. (See attached graph.)

Increased BTS funding will deliver high returns by informing transportation policy in ways that can make transportation spending and service delivery more cost-effective, and boost private sector performance and economic growth.

Transportation is integral to our economy and country, from households to businesses to government. It makes up 16 percent of consumer spending. Large corporations and small businesses alike rely on our nation's transportation infrastructure for its personnel, clients and customers and the delivery and distribution of products and supplies. Similarly, state, local and federal governments rely on the transportation infrastructure for safety, economic development, delivery of services, and workforce access.

Given the importance of transportation to our economy and our country, understanding our transportation infrastructure is imperative. The BTS is the principal source of timely, accurate and objective information on the current state, safety, and performance of highway, rail, air, maritime, and pipeline transportation systems. Local, state and national policymakers, businesses, the agricultural sector, regulators, and other transportation users rely upon BTS data for planning, investment, business location, and other important decisions. BTS data are also critical in price determination for any manufactured, agricultural, or food good that is routinely transported over large distances and by different modes. As the value of goods per

pound increases, and the value of time for both people and goods grow, we will need an even more responsive transportation system to be effective competitors at home and abroad.

The recent National Research Council (NRC) study on transportation data requirements, Special Report 304, states:

*Transportation decision makers face a complex, changing, and uncertain environment, yet the essential data for supporting transportation operations, policy, and investment decisions at all governmental levels and in the private sector are fragmented and incomplete in coverage and detail, lack timeliness, and are poorly integrated for analysis of current and emerging issues.*

As a result of BTS's constrained budget, the intercity passenger travel survey has not been done since 1995 and the vehicle and inventory and use survey since 2002. The FY16 request for the BTS includes both these important surveys. It also proposes the development of strategies for measuring long-distance travel from a variety of other sources including other surveys, administrative records, and emerging data sources. Funding the FY16 request would provide up-to-date data to inform safety risk exposure, infrastructure performance, emissions, and economic performance.

We understand the difficult fiscal environment but urge you to consider the immense potential returns on this modest funding boost for the BTS.

Please direct any questions on this letter to Steve Pierson, Director of Science Policy for the American Statistical Association: pierson@amstat.org; 703.302.1841.

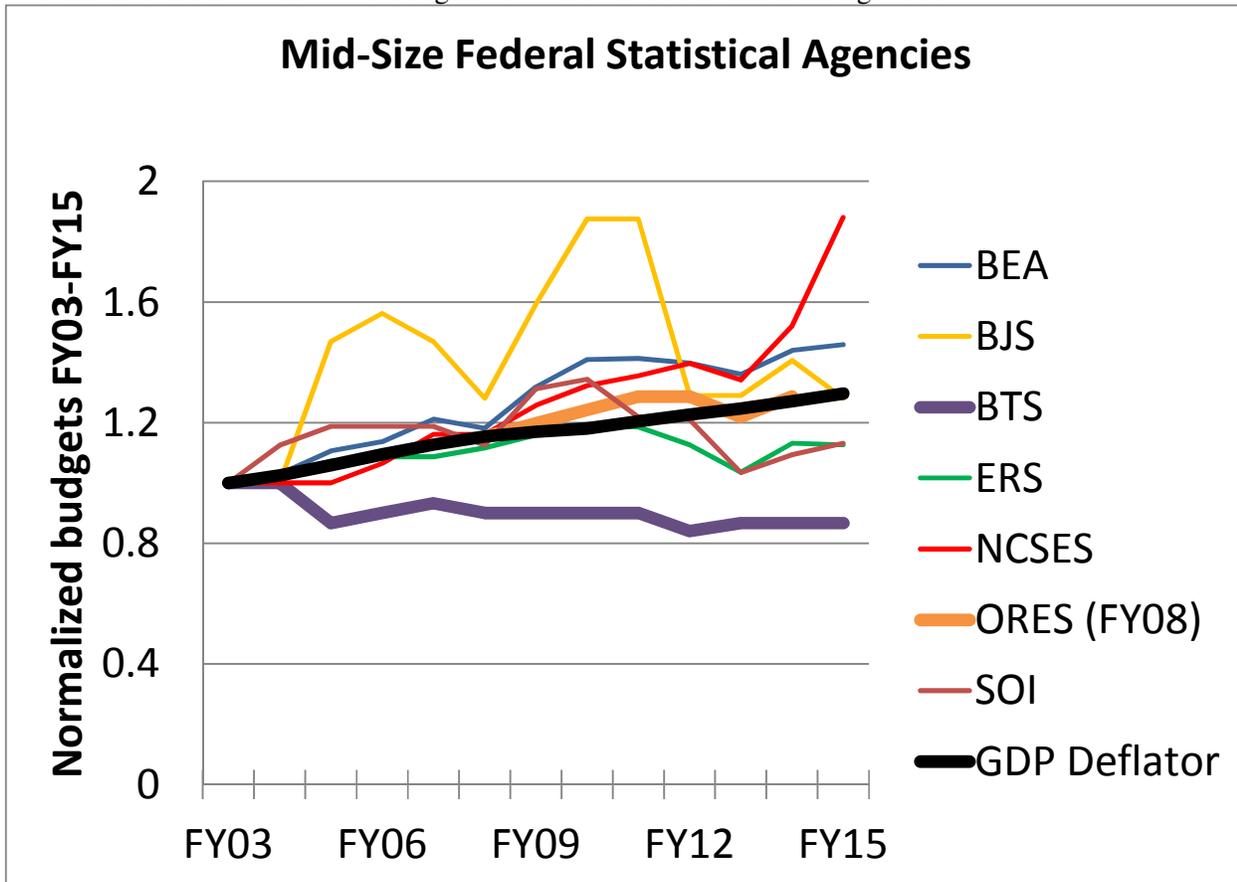
Thank you for your consideration.

AAA  
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety  
American Association for Public Opinion  
Research  
American Highway Users Alliance  
American Planning Association  
American Public Transportation Association  
American Society of Civil Engineers  
American Statistical Association  
American Trucking Associations  
Association of Academic Survey Research  
Organizations  
Association of Public Data Users  
Center for Data Innovation

Consortium of Social Science Associations  
Council of Professional Associations on Federal  
Statistics  
Institute for Transportation and Development  
Policy (ITDP)  
Intelligent Transportation Society of America  
International Air Rail Organisation  
National Association for Business Economics  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
State International Development Organizations  
Surface Transportation Policy Partnership  
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Cc: Members, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee,  
Members, Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works  
Members, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
Members, Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies  
Appropriation Subcommittee

Enclosure: Chart of FY03-FY15 budgets for mid-size federal statistical agencies



The budgets of the seven mid-sized statistical agencies normalized to their FY03 levels, along with the GDP deflator to account for inflation. The Social Security Administration Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics' budget is normalized (and adjusted for inflation) to its FY08 level, when the current accounting scheme was implemented. SOI's FY13 dip is due partially to a budget adjustment. (Figure 1 adapted from <http://magazine.amstat.org/blog/2014/03/01/science-policy-03-2014/>.)

Agency Abbreviations:

- BEA: Bureau of Economic Analysis
- BJS: Bureau of Justice Statistics
- ERS: Economic Research Service
- NCSES: National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, National Science Foundation
- ORES: Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics, Social Security Administration
- SOI: Statistics of Income Division, IRS