

BUREAU OF TRANSPORTATION STATISTICS

The Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) is the principal federal statistical agency that compiles data and statistics on how transportation infrastructure withstands hazards, and how reliably, sustainably, and safely people and commodities move within the United States and across our borders. BTS also provides statistics on how transportation contributes and enables the nation's economy. Its key products include statistics on freight and supply chains, economic trends, accessibility and availability of transportation services, transportation equity and climate impacts, commercial aviation travel and performance, transportation vulnerability and resilience, and precursor safety data.

**The following is based on publicly available information and select information from our questionnaire.

STRENGTH OF BTS'S SUPPORT†

Autonomy: Weak. BTS has more autonomy protection in statute than most statistical agencies. However, its budget and contracting authority is weak, if not counterproductive, leaving the agency's professional autonomy vulnerable.

Budget/staffing: Challenging. BTS has lost 46% in purchasing power since FY 2003 through its main funding source, the Highway Trust Fund (HTF). A positive aspect of the HTF funding is that it provides stability and some flexibility for longer-term planning as well as support through government shutdowns. BTS also receives funding through other sources, as described below. DOT recently lifted BTS's FTE employee cap. As a result, for FY 2024, BTS has 83 FTE, including 21 vacancies.

Parent agency: Mixed. The administration has consistently requested budget increases for BTS through authorization and appropriation and, except for BTS budget independence, generally respects BTS professional autonomy. The Department of Transportation (DOT) has also recently allowed BTS increased flexibility on its total FTE. On the other hand, DOT let BTS slide from reporting directly to the Secretary to four levels down in the Department's bureaucratic layering. Further, limitations in HR and other shared services provided by the department sometimes impede BTS's ability to be nimble and fully effective as a statistical agency.

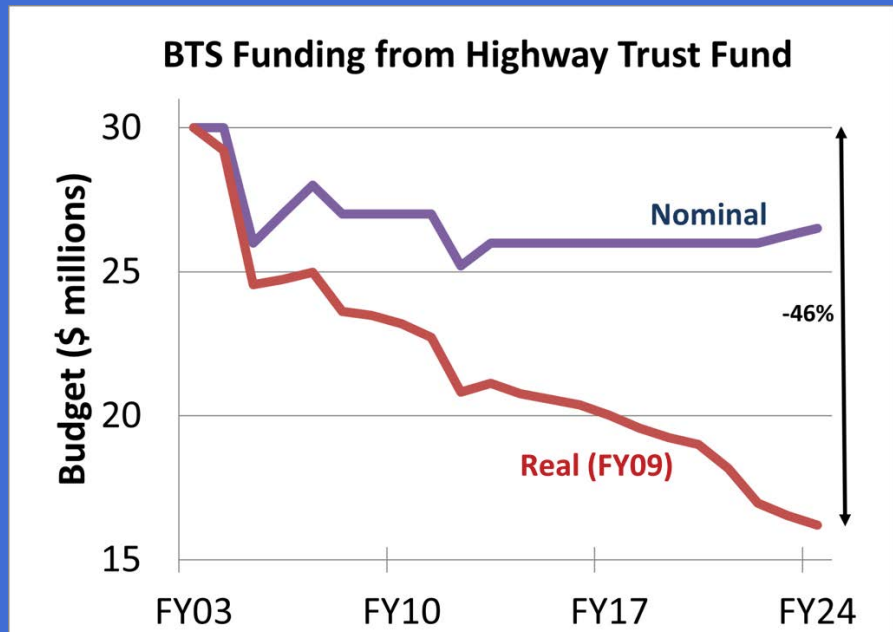
† See Supporting Materials F for an explanation of the support ratings.

AGENCY FAST FACTS

Budget inputs and FY24 level

1. BTS is funded through the Highway Trust Fund via authorization. Its FY 2024 authorization level is \$26.5 million, to increase by a quarter million each year to \$27 million in FY 2026.
2. BTS is also funded through the Airport and Airway Trust Fund at the discretion of the Federal Aviation Administration, averaging \$4.5 million annually.
3. BTS is eligible for funding through appropriations, which provided \$3 million in FY 2023.
4. Funding through interagency agreements with DOT agencies and other federal agencies totaled about \$9.5 million in FY 2024.

Funding history, inflation adjusted



Appointment of head & layers down in DOT org chart

BTS is one of eight principal federal statistical agencies for which the head is a career senior executive service appointee.

Four: The following layers are between the BTS Director and Secretary of Transportation:

- ➔ Deputy Secretary
- ➔ Undersecretary
- ➔ Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology

<p>Other</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ BTS staff includes statisticians, data scientists, transportation specialists, economists, and geographers, with the latter two together making up half of BTS's full-time employees. ➔ BTS products include, but are not limited to, three congressionally mandated reports; 13 freight programs; airline usage, financial, and performance data; monthly economic indicator; transportation contribution to economy; near misses reporting systems covering three transportation modes; and 120 unique geospatial data layers. Many products leverage administrative records, real-time GPS or operational data, and private data sources. ➔ <u>BTS's authorizing legislation</u> establishes that the director shall "serve as the senior advisor to the Secretary on data and statistics" and lists such department-wide duties as "improve the coordination of information collection efforts with other Federal agencies"; "continually improve surveys and data collection methods of the Department to improve the accuracy and utility of transportation statistics"; "encourage the standardization of data, data collection methods, and data management and storage technologies for data collected by" such entities as "the operating administrations of the Department, State and local governments, metropolitan planning organizations; and private sector entities." ➔ Also somewhat unique, the BTS director is "appointed in the competitive service by the Secretary." ➔ BTS houses the National Transportation Library—a digital library—which maintains and facilitates access to statistical and other information needed for transportation decision-making. BTS is the only statistical agency to host such a library and benefits from the perspectives of its librarians and information scientists.
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<p>Recent successes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ In the first months of the pandemic, BTS developed and posted transportation and economic indicators to track the impacts of the pandemic on transportation. ➔ To advise the National Economic Council on 2021 supply chain disruption, BTS collaborated with five other departments to develop weekly indicators monitoring the direct and indirect impacts on freight industry and supply chains, the production of which is ongoing. ➔ The White House Supply Chain Envoy, DOT Office of the Chief Information Officer, and BTS initiated the Freight Logistics Optimization Works (FLOW) program to further aid supply chain challenges and resilience. FLOW is made possible by BTS guaranteeing—through the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA)—the protection of proprietary data provided by the freight industry. ➔ BTS collaborated with its partners to reinstate the Vehicle Inventory and Use Survey (VIUS) in 2021 for the first time since 2002. ➔ BTS's near-miss reporting program has expanded to transit and maritime industries. Near-miss data are more effective safe and way to identify risk factors without the occurrence of an actual accident. ➔ BTS provides relevant information on nationally significant disruptions of transportation. For example, BTS delivered information about the Port of Baltimore on the day of the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge.
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<p>Agency strengths</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → BTS has strong statutory professional autonomy protections for publications as well as data collection and analysis. → Funding as an allocation account from the Highway Trust Fund provides multiyear funding of large-scale products such as the Commodity Flow Survey and is not subject to disruptions from lapses in appropriations.
<p>Agency threats/ vulnerabilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → BTS is the smallest of the principal federal statistical agencies and has more products than staff. → BTS's descent down the department's bureaucratic layering threatens the agency's ability to effectively execute its legislative mandates. For example, despite the statutory role of the director as senior advisor to the Secretary on data and statistics, BTS leadership is rarely included in department executive-level meetings where major decisions on data and evidence-building are made. → Further complicating DOT's engagement of BTS, <u>DOT has seven other units that maintain statistical programs</u>: Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Federal Highway Administration (FHA), Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA). The combined FY 2020 funding level of the seven units, \$124.6 million, nearly five times that of BTS—and the distributed nature of DOT statistical programs dilutes BTS's role in DOT's statistical program, in part to keep BTS programs from overlapping with the other seven DOT units.
<p>Agency challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → BTS's main funding, from the Highway Trust Fund, has been flat in nominal dollars for 20 years, resulting in 46% loss in purchasing power, hindering BTS's ability to be innovative and fully provide relevant and timely statistics on the dynamic transportation system. → BTS is sometimes mandated to carry out work for which no funding is provided. For example, in the 2015 Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, BTS was required to establish a "port performance statistics program to provide nationally consistent measures of performance." The 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act required BTS to study federal support for local decision-making. The 2022 Ocean Shipping Reform Act requires BTS to "publish statistics relating to the dwell time of equipment used in intermodal transportation at the top 25 ports, including inland ports."

<p>Agency opportunities</p>	<p>→ With more support, BTS could do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop foundational data programs to enable the transformation of our current transportation system to a highly automated one. For example, BTS could build and maintain a high-definition digital geospatial data infrastructure to support further expansion of autonomous driving. • Develop a transportation insecurity index, similar to USDA's Food Insecurity and HUD's Housing Insecurity indexes. • Develop the national supply chain modeling system to project transportation, economic, and environment impacts on the United States of alternative freight policies and investments, and different assumptions about the changing patterns of global trade, future consumer demand, supply chain outlook, etc. The proposed system will be analogous to the National Energy Modeling System, the Energy Information Administration's popular and influential program that projects the production, imports, exports, conversion, consumption, and prices of energy, subject to a number of assumptions and is used for policy analyses requested by decision-makers in the White House; the U.S. Congress; and other DOE offices. • Identify and rank barriers to electric vehicle adoption. • Lead DOT in assuring the integrity of data and algorithms used in the department's AI applications. • More fully support Congressional and Executive Branch initiatives regarding the economy, equity, and access to healthcare, education, work, and groceries.
<p>Agency-specific recommendations</p>	<p>In addition to the all-agency recommendations in the body of the report, we recommend that:</p> <p>→ DOT should revisit BTS's role—as the department's sole federal statistical agency and its director as department's Statistical Official—and that of evidence-based policymaking and could consider an Office-of-Homeland-Security-Statistics-inspired move to confirm DOT's emphasis on evidence-based policymaking and the role of BTS.</p>