

## AGENCY OVERVIEW

# BUREAU OF TRANSPORTATION STATISTICS (BTS)

## SUMMARY OF KEY CRITICAL SUPPORT AREAS AND LEADERSHIP

### Leadership

Rolf Schmitt is deputy director, serving in the capacity of director. Schmitt succeeds Patricia Hu, who retired in March after serving as director since 2011.

### Budget

(see figure below, Table 2.2 in body of report, and our [online resource](#)). *NB:* BTS's main funding source is the Highway Trust Fund. Its [FY22-FY26 funding was determined in 2021](#). BTS is the only statistical agency of the 13 for which its main funding is not determined through the appropriations process.

- BTS's FY25 budget is \$26.8 million, compared to FY24 level of \$26.5 million, which amounts to:
  - an estimated 1.5% loss of purchasing power from FY24.
  - a 31.6% loss of purchasing power from FY09 and 25.4% loss of purchasing power from FY21.
- The FY26 budget is \$27.0 million, which represents an estimated 1.5% increase in purchasing power.

### Staffing

(see Table 2.1 in body of report):

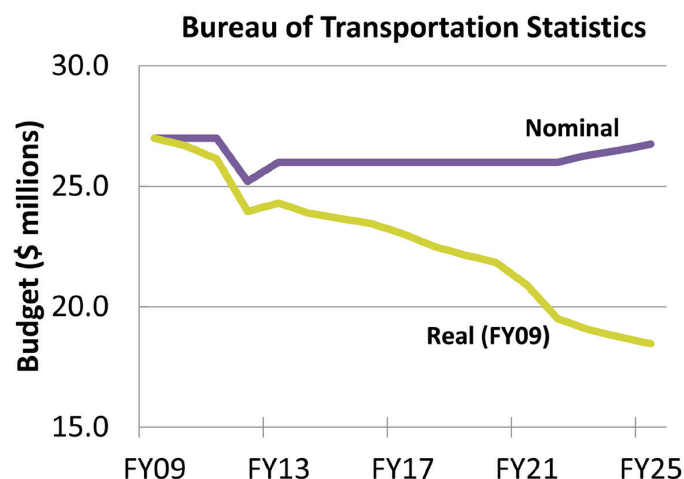
- BTS has lost an estimated 31% in staffing since FY24, from 75 FTEs to 52.
- DOT does not include proposed staffing level for BTS in its annual FY26.

### Parent Agency

Because statistical agencies are hesitant or not allowed to communicate with outside entities, and the parent agencies are communicating little information specific to statistical agencies, we have only one agency-specific update in this category. In November 2025, BTS posted its [modernization efforts](#), likely a positive indication of parent agency support. However, the fact that the staffing cuts occurred indicates lack of support for the statistical agency, support that is required by the Evidence Act.

### Statistical Integrity Safeguards

Because statistical agencies are hesitant or not allowed to communicate with outside entities and the parent agencies are communicating little information specific to statistical agencies, we have no agency-specific updates in this category. A degree of open communication with outside stakeholders is an important component of statistical integrity safeguards and government transparency. We nevertheless note that BTS continues to release statistics following its published schedule, in accordance with its legislative safeguards under section 6302(d) of Title 49, US Code: "The [BTS] Director shall not be required to obtain the approval of any other officer or employee of the Department with respect to the collection or analysis of any information; or prior to publication, to obtain the approval of any other officer or employee of the United States Government with respect to the substance of any statistical technical reports or press releases lawfully prepared by the Director."



### Appropriations for BTS in Nominal and Inflation-Adjusted ("Real") Dollars, Fiscal Years 2009–2025

NOTE: The GDP deflator is used to adjust nominal appropriations for inflation.

SOURCE: [ASA online resources](#)

## IMPACTS

We have no public information on any major developments to report. Being funded through the Highway Trust Fund, BTS continued normal operations through the 2025 government shutdown.

## SUMMARY

BTS has lost a substantial amount of purchasing power. While updated staffing information is not available, BTS is known to have had employee turnover during 2025. We rate the BTS resources as **CHALLENGING** due to these concerns about budget and staffing. According to our 2024 report rubric, this rating means, “The agency’s efforts to meet its Evidence Act responsibilities are challenged.”

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the all-agency recommendations in the body of the report, we reiterate and update the recommendation from last year, namely that:

- As part of its “1DOT” consolidation initiative—“[a comprehensive, long-term effort](#) to unify and strengthen the Department of Transportation” in order to “foster accountability, eliminate redundancies, and enhance efficiency across all transportation modes”—DOT should consolidate all functions and responsibilities that rely on statistical science and statistical principles into BTS, DOT’s statistical agency, one of 13 recognized by OMB, in order to take advantage of efficiencies, ensure statistical rigor for all DOT statistical and data products, and otherwise reduce redundancies.

We also urge the recruitment and prompt selection of a BTS director.

## BUREAU OF TRANSPORTATION STATISTICS: 2024 HEALTH ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

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For full text, see <https://bit.ly/NationsDataAtRiskBTS>.

The July 2024 assessment found that BTS plays a critical role in measuring the performance of the U.S. transportation system. BTS produces data on freight, aviation, climate impacts, safety, and economic contributions of transportation, and is the only statistical agency to house a national digital transportation library. Despite its broad mandate and innovative work, BTS faces significant structural and resource-related challenges.

### KEY SUCCESSSES AND STRENGTHS

BTS has demonstrated innovation and responsiveness, such as developing real-time indicators during the COVID-19 pandemic and collaborating across agencies to monitor supply chain disruptions. BTS co-launched the Freight Logistics Optimization Works (FLOW) program to improve freight data-sharing and reinstated the Vehicle Inventory and Use Survey after a 19-year hiatus. Its near-miss safety reporting system has expanded across transportation modes, and BTS continues to provide timely data during major disruptions, such as the Port of Baltimore bridge collapse. The agency benefits from strong statutory protections for its data and publications and has access to multiyear funding through the Highway Trust Fund.

### CRITICAL CHALLENGES AND VULNERABILITIES

BTS's purchasing power has declined by 46% since 2003, and it remains the smallest principal statistical agency despite a growing portfolio. Its position within DOT has been downgraded, limiting its influence and access to decision-making. The agency is often tasked with unfunded mandates, and its role is diluted by the presence of seven other DOT units with statistical programs. Staffing remains a challenge, with 21 of 83 authorized FTEs vacant in FY24.

### 2024 SUPPORT RATINGS SUMMARY

The assessment assigned:

- Statistical integrity safeguards: **Weak**, due to limited budget and contracting authority despite statutory protections;
- Parent agency support: **Mixed**, with recent flexibility gains but diminished organizational standing; and
- Budget/staffing: **Challenging**, reflecting long-term funding erosion and staffing shortfalls.