



March 4, 2022

Docket Management Facility
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Room PL-401
Washington, D.C. 20590-0001

Re: Docket DOT-OST-2021-0160, U.S. DOT Transportation Research and Development Strategic Plan

Today I respectfully offer comments on the U.S. Department of Transportation's (U.S. DOT) request for information on the Transportation Research and Development Strategic Plan.

ARTBA's membership includes representation from all components of the transportation construction industry, including leading universities involved in transportation research. Our association uses this diversity to develop consensus policy positions, then works with U.S. DOT and other public agencies to share and implement them, as well as participating in the department's regulatory and policy processes. ARTBA's Research and Education division consists of leading university engineering professors and transportation researchers and educators.

With passage of the landmark Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), the department and industry must work closely together to implement the law's transportation policy provisions, including research initiatives.

According to the request for information, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology seeks public comments to inform the development of U.S. DOT's Research, Development, and Technology (RD&T) Strategic Plan for fiscal years (FY) 2022-2026.

In addition to the primary purposes of transportation research, as outlined in 49 U.S.C. Ch. 65, U.S. DOT seeks to achieve six strategic goals identified in its FY 2022-2026 Draft Strategic Framework: safety, economic strength and global competitiveness, equity, climate and sustainability, transformation, and organizational excellence.

In implementing the RD&T Strategic Plan, ARTBA urges U.S. DOT to focus on the following core principles:

Balanced Approach to Research Initiatives: Future research supported by U.S. DOT should encompass a balanced portfolio among conceptual, basic, and applied initiatives. This would include programs enabling the nation to stay ahead of the innovation curve, such as through

the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Infrastructure program to support early and advanced conceptual research. The department should balance this type of work with efforts to research, develop, and implement applied technologies and advancements that practitioners can use in the field during the near term.

Promoting Experimentation and Learning: Future research initiatives should allow for the sharing and processing of negative outcomes. The research community believes there is value and information that can be shared from projects where the results diverged from initial intentions or expectations. These results can enhance the learning process and provide insights to U.S. DOT and the research community.

Greater Interaction with Transportation Industry Stakeholders: U.S. DOT should prioritize disseminating relevant research technologies to the broader transportation community and support technology transfer and feedback from stakeholders. The relationship among universities, research programs, and industry partners can serve as the foundation for future research and information-sharing.

Opportunities for Open-ended Research: More open-ended research in the new and existing programs established by U.S. DOT could facilitate new breakthroughs. There is no better place to nurture innovation than in the inherently creative environment of universities and other educational institutions. The IIJA establishes the open research initiative pilot program, which will allow institutions to submit unsolicited research proposals. However, there could be additional opportunities for more open-ended research.

The IIJA provides a generational opportunity for U.S. DOT, state and local transportation agencies, and the industry to work together in improving the nation's transportation infrastructure. Research and technology are important contributors to securing that outcome and fostering future innovation.

We hope the department's RD&T Strategic Plan will reflect the principles outlined above. ARTBA looks forward to continued collaboration as U.S. DOT devises its RD&T Strategic Plan and seeks to fulfill the IIJA's promise.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Bauer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a stylized "B".

David Bauer
President & CEO