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2024 FEDERAL
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OUTLOOK



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"Transportation Builder" (TB) is the official publication of the American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA). We bring together all facets of the transportation construction industry to responsibly advocate for infrastructure investment and policy that meet the nation's need for safe and efficient movement of people and goods. ARTBA also offers value-added programs and services that create an environment where our members thrive in a competitive world. TB is the primary source of business, legislative, regulatory, safety and economic news that matters most to transportation development professionals.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

BETH MCGINN | Editorial Director

Playing the Long Game



Beth McGinn
Editorial Director
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For several years, members of ARTBA's Workforce Development Council have been sharing and replicating successful strategies for addressing the nationwide shortage of qualified construction workers.

One program that really stands out was launched by the Association of Oklahoma General Contractors (AOGC). They found a way to fill their pipeline with talent while filling at-risk youth with hope for a better future. By partnering with an organization that

helps teens experiencing homelessness, AOGC members are playing the long game—investing in their future workforce and the future of their community.

In each issue of *Transportation Builder* moving forward, we will highlight another innovative program from our Council members aimed at developing the workforce of tomorrow.

The long game is also the theme of our Chair Tim Duit's column. On page 6, Duit talks about the need to develop

the next generation of industry advocates through the ARTBA Foundation's Industry Leader Development Program (ILDP). It has produced two ARTBA chairs, with a third set to assume the role later this year. Duit explains that the industry's ability to recruit and cultivate future leaders will determine its success in achieving future goals.

The future for transportation construction looks bright thanks in part to continued funding from the 2021 bipartisan federal infrastructure law.

In our page 10 cover story about the year ahead, ARTBA Chief Economist Dr. Alison Premo Black says we can expect market activity to increase or be steady in 38 states. She and her legislative and legal colleagues offer their outlook for funding, legislation, and regulations. They may not have a crystal ball—but with their many decades of experience advocating for and analyzing the transportation construction industry—you could say that they are very good at playing the long game.

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CHAIR'S CORNER

TIM DUIT | President, Duit Construction Co., Inc.

ARTBA Leadership Program Prepares Next Generation to Take the Field

Every industry experiences a “changing of the guard”—the inevitable shift in leadership from one generation to the next. We see it happening now in football.

Recently, three of the game’s greatest coaches have moved on. University of Alabama’s Nick Saban, 72, who won seven NCAA National Championships during his 28-year career, has retired. Bill Belichick, 71, with eight total Super Bowl wins, parted ways with the New England Patriots. And the Seattle Seahawks’ Pete Carroll, 72, one of the few coaches to win both a college football national championship and a Super Bowl, was let go.

On the other side of the equation are the many young coaches entering the picture. Carroll’s replacement Mike Macdonald is the youngest head coach in the league at 36. Belichick’s is the second youngest at 37. Last year, the college football world saw 23 new head coaches hired and over half of those were rookies.

This shift is not unique to football. Every industry or profession needs to think about succession. Who leads their team into battle when the rest of us are gone?

In the world of transportation construction associations, the ARTBA Foundation is working to develop the next generation. Two graduates of the Industry Leader Development Program (ILDP) have already been elected ARTBA chair, and a third is scheduled to assume the position later this year.

For nearly three decades, the two-and-a-half day “boot camp” style ILDP has provided the industry’s “rising stars” with an overview of federal transportation policy, funding, and regulatory issues. Held in conjunction with ARTBA’s Federal Issues Program, ILDP attendees learn how to become more politically

engaged and effective in advocating for increased transportation infrastructure investment. Personal interactions with federal agency officials, briefings on transportation policy and economic issues, and a visit with their members of Congress, are what make this experience so unique. More than 800 professionals have completed the program.

New this year is a valuable career-development session led by a former Navy Seal and national security advisor to two U.S. presidents. Jeff Eggers will explain why humble leadership is more important than heroic leadership; why leadership’s role is to cultivate rather than control; how a sense of “we” is the common thread amongst all high-performing teams; and why the most significant risk factors to a corporation are internal.

The ILDP takes place May 13-15 at the JW Marriott in the Nation’s Capital.

Applications are due by close of business on **Friday, March 29**, and are available at artbafoundation.org. The target age is 30-50.

I encourage you to nominate someone from your firm, organization, or public agency.

The knowledge they take away will help shape their career and ultimately the future of our industry. We need to make sure we have our best leaders on the field.

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DAVE BAUER | President & CEO, ARTBA

Champions Are Made in the Off Season

More than 120 million people tuned in to watch the Kansas City Chiefs win their second consecutive Super Bowl, making it the most-watched in history. While many Americans now find themselves with a lot more free time each Sunday, for NFL teams, the end of one season means a transition to the next.

Rather than practices and games, coaches and players will shift their attention to the combine, draft and free agency, assessing their teams' weaknesses and how to address them. This process fortifies a team's foundation before they make a push to win next year's big game.

Similarly, our community must utilize the coming months to bolster its roster of infrastructure assets and champions well before the scheduled reauthorization of the highway and public transportation programs in 2026.

Securing continued growth in federal transportation investment demands that we show lawmakers the return their states are getting from the landmark 2021 infrastructure law. As such, the efforts we began two years ago to quantify the status and impact of federal highway funds is a foundational component of our advocacy for the next reauthorization campaign. We continue to engage with Capitol Hill by hosting congressional briefings, sharing state-specific updates, and highlighting Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) projects underway in all 50 states.

Meanwhile, the upcoming election will offer an opportunity to enhance our efforts outside of Washington. Over the next nine months, we will partner with ARTBA members and state chapter affiliates to influence federal candidates on transportation infrastructure issues by:

- Hosting congressional infrastructure supporters at transportation construction jobsites across the nation;
- Preparing educational materials for candidates on the law's local impacts; and
- Assessing candidate positions on infrastructure issues, and then utilizing social media and other tools to promote infrastructure champions.

Those elected in 2024 will be responsible for renewing federal highway and public transportation investment when the current law expires in 2026, underscoring the critical importance of this election cycle. Our goal is to help ensure November's elections will hopefully yield a new Congress chock full of infrastructure champions. And while our Super Bowl may not be until 2026, the preparations we make today will pay dividends in the months and years ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Bauer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a stylized "D" and "B".

2024

FEDERAL ISSUES PROGRAM & TRANSPORTATION CONSTRUCTION COALITION FLY-IN

KEY FOCUS:

- Congressional and Biden administration perspectives on implementation of the infrastructure law.
- Federal transportation policy and regulatory updates.
- Transportation construction market conditions report.



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The Road Ahead: 2024 Federal Legislative, Regulatory & Political Outlook

BY BETH MCGINN
bmcginn@artba.org



2024

Baseball legend Yogi Berra once said, “It’s tough to make predictions, especially about the future.” Prognostication is a fool’s errand—particularly in Washington, D.C., where inter-party fighting, and a narrowly divided Congress makes for an unpredictable climate.

What is certain, however, is that decisions made—or in some cases not made—in the Nation’s Capital can significantly impact the transportation construction industry. So, what lies ahead for surface transportation funding programs? Which new regulations can we expect to see from government agencies? How will the transportation construction market perform? What, if anything, are states doing to meet their federal matching requirements and boost their own investment?

Of course, ARTBA does not have a crystal ball, but we do have some of the transportation construction industry’s best legal and regulatory minds, lobbyists, and economists. With a great deal at stake this year, we asked them for their insights.

Politics & Policy

The year ahead will be dominated by the presidential and congressional elections, and as such, are not typically known in Washington for transformative legislative achievements. Political ads will blanket air waves and news outlets will provide wall-to-wall coverage of the races. ARTBA Senior Vice President of Congressional Relations Dean Franks cautions industry professionals not to lose sight of the big picture.

“Let’s not forget that 34 Senate seats—and all 435 House seats—are on the ballot this year,” Franks said. “The outcome of this year’s election will determine who’s responsible for the next surface transportation reauthorization bill.”

ARTBA Vice President of Legislative Affairs Lauren Schapker said ARTBA will be working closely with its state chapter affiliates to boost candidates who are champions for infrastructure investment.

With all the intense political noise, we wondered if Congress could legislate.

“We anticipate this congressional session being bookended by a flurry of activity,” Schapker said. “We expect Congress will try to wrap up the appropriations bills before the spring, and then a quiet period before a potentially busy lame duck session.”

Because House and Senate leaders were unable to agree on Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 appropriations bills, federal surface transportation programs have been operating under a series of stop gap spending measures since October



2023. Current funding runs out March 1, and ARTBA will be pushing for completion of the FY 2024 appropriations process to help ensure that year-three of Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding is achieved.

The association and its allies will then pivot to the FY 2025 appropriations cycle. If past is prologue, we might be in for more last-minute funding drama and threats of government shutdowns. The last time Congress completed work on all 12 spending bills before the end of the fiscal year (Sept. 30) was in 1997.

With Congress chronically unable to finish its work on time, and members worried about their re-election campaigns—the heavy lifting for FY 2025 spending bills may shift until after the Nov. 5 elections.

Rules & Regulations

Based on the regulatory agenda released last fall by the White House, ARTBA Vice President and Counsel for Regulatory Affairs Prianka Sharma expects a very busy year.

“We are preparing for several rules to be finalized before the end of the year—some significant safety and labor rules as well as environmental policies,” she warns.

Among the environmental regulations Sharma is tracking are the Council for Environmental Quality’s “Phase Two” rules for implementing the National Environmental Protection Act and new air emissions reporting requirements out of the Environmental Protection Agency.

In the safety arena, the Mine Safety and Health Administration is expected to finalize its respirable silica safety standards, while the Occupational Safety and Health Administration plans to propose heat safety standards and finalize its worker walkaround rule.

*See **Outlook**, 12*

“We are preparing for several rules to become finalized before the end of the year—some significant safety and labor rules as well as environmental policies.”

– ARTBA Vice President and Counsel for Regulatory Affairs Prianka Sharma

On the contracting side, the Federal Highway Administration has signaled potential changes to the longstanding Buy America waiver for manufactured products.

In each case, ARTBA is working closely with the relevant agency to ensure the industry’s perspectives are heard. Sharma said the association’s state chapter affiliates and member firms will be providing input and real-world examples of regulatory impact on the jobsite.

New regulations from federal agencies are also possible, Sharma said. She points out that it is not uncommon for presidential administrations to want to finish implementing their policy agendas as their terms wind down.

“If we do see new proposals—they will likely be fast tracked by the administration with very little, if any, time to comment.”

Market Conditions

A possible regulatory blizzard notwithstanding, the 2024 transportation construction market outlook appears strong, thanks to continued federal and state investment. ARTBA Chief Economist Dr. Alison Premo Black estimates public highway, pavement, and street construction—the largest market sector—will grow by double digits for the second consecutive year—reaching

\$126 billion in 2024 compared to \$108.6 billion in 2023, an increase of 16 percent.

“The increase in construction activity is supported by two main factors,” Black noted. “First is the number of projects supported by the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that are now in the construction phase.”

Since the start of FY 2022, federal investment has supported states initiating more than 60,000 new transportation improvements across all 50 states and in nearly every county. This includes spending on new construction projects, right of way purchases, planning and design work and other eligible activities.

“Second is the fact many states are increasing their own revenues to match federal funds and make additional transportation investments,” Black added. “State officials are using a combination of General Fund transfers, bond issues, business taxes, and other user-fee increases.”

This investment, including work on major projects valued at \$100 million or more, contributed to double-digit growth in highway and bridge construction activity in 2023 and accounted for over 70 percent of the growth in state department of transportation (DOT) budgets.

Looking ahead, Black says federal funds will continue to support additional market activity. Recent increases in state transportation revenues are also driving DOT FY 2024 budget growth, which for many states began on July 1.

According to ARTBA’s state level budget tracking service, state DOTs plan to increase highway and bridge capital spending by 13 percent in FY 2024. Over half of this growth is driven by significant budget increases in Florida, Texas, Tennessee, Minnesota, and Ohio.

Transportation construction market activity is expected to increase or be steady in 38 states. Based on recent state and local government contract awards, some of the largest markets expected to show growth are Texas, Florida, Georgia, Connecticut, California, Kansas, Illinois, Colorado, Pennsylvania, and New York.

“States are also beginning to leverage more of the IIJA’s new bridge-specific funding capacity... They have committed over one-third of their available bridge formula funds, which they have four years to use.”

– ARTBA Chief Economist Dr. Alison Premo Black

**2024 Forecast:
Value of Work by Sector**

- Public highway, pavement, and street construction: from \$108.6 billion in 2023 to \$126 billion (+16%)
- Public transit and rail construction: from \$25.4 billion to \$26.9 billion (+6%)
- Bridge and tunnel work: from \$22.5 billion to \$26.4 billion (+17%)
- Airport terminal and runway work: from \$25.6 billion to \$29 billion (+14%)
- Port and waterway construction: from \$5.2 billion to \$5.7 billion (+9%)

Workforce

One key market challenge continues to be industry workforce availability. “Finding workers remains a concern,” Black said.

The number of workers employed by highway, street, and bridge contractors reached record levels over the 2023 summer construction season, with employment up by over 30,000, or eight percent, compared to 2022.

The number of hours worked by employees on jobsites was down slightly compared to 2022, averaging just over 45 hours per week, as more workers were hired. Average hourly wages are up four percent, compared to eight percent in 2022.

The construction unemployment rate was in the range of 3.5 percent to four percent for the 2023 summer construction season, in line with 2019 levels. However, the number of job openings in the construction industry continues to be high, indicating a demand for workers that is not being filled.

State & Local Levels

The year ahead also promises to be a busy one for transportation funding advocates at the state and local level. The bulk of new funding will come not from legislation, but at the ballot box, according to ARTBA's Transportation Investment Advocacy Center (TIAC) Senior Director Carolyn Simons.

“In state legislatures, we unsurprisingly are not expecting it to be a very big year,” said Simons. “Last year, we saw about \$23 billion in new revenue approved. In 2024, I would not expect half of that because many legislatures are not in session or have short budgetary sessions, and most local lawmakers are focused on reelection campaigns.”

However, TIAC does anticipate an increase in ballot measures compared to last year, particularly in large metropolitan areas with lots of voters. Simons says in a



presidential election year, when voter turnout is expected to be higher than normal, funding advocates across the country are working hard to get their initiatives included on the ballot.

Simons points to several states that are “feeling the heat” to find new money for their transportation programs. Among them: Maryland, Nebraska, Wyoming, Arizona, California, Georgia, Washington State and Oregon, where state officials have expressed the need to increase transportation revenue.

As for trends in funding models at the state level, Simons points to fees on Electric Vehicles (EVs).

“Of the state legislation tracked in the first month of 2024—half are related to some sort of EV fee,” she explained. “Half of those are fees on public charging stations. This is a trend that has picked up pace in recent years.”

Ready for Anything

With states focused on increasing revenues at the ballot box and lawmakers at all levels focused on keeping their jobs, any new policies affecting transportation construction will be decided by voters and regulatory agencies.

One thing remains certain: with three years of infrastructure funding still to come, the transportation construction market will continue to grow.

While we do not know what curve balls 2024 will throw our way, ARTBA and its team of experts—like the great catcher and philosopher Yogi Berra—will step up to the plate. In other words: “It ain’t over until it’s over.”

Beth McGinn is ARTBA vice president of communications.



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A “Win-Win” for Construction and Youth in Oklahoma

BY CAROLYN KRAMER SIMONS
csimons@artba.org

Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of stories about how ARTBA members are tackling workforce shortages.

Like many states—and many sectors of the economy—Oklahoma’s construction industry is hungry for new talent. An aging workforce, pandemic-related disruptions, and a slew of new projects thanks to historic levels of infrastructure investment, have contributed to a nationwide construction worker shortage.

Seeing his members struggle to fill jobs, Association of Oklahoma General Contractors (AOGC) Executive Director Bobby Stem knew something needed to be done. As a member of ARTBA’s Workforce Development Task Force, he and other state contractor leaders have been thinking outside of the box—partnering with local non-profits and exploring ways to attract a new generation of skilled workers to the jobsite.

Job Corps to the Rescue

“About a year ago a friend mentioned Jobs Corps to me,” said Stem. “After several conversations and many visits [with the non-profit], we found this to be a very worthy cause and reliable partner.”

Job Corps began in the 1960s as a federally funded antipoverty campaign. While aspects of the organization have changed over the years, it continues to carry out its original mission of training disadvantaged young people for a better tomorrow.

Today’s Job Corps is made up of youth ages 16 to 24 who are experiencing a life transition. Many are homeless or lack a supportive home environment. Students live on campus where they receive meals, medical care, and job training as they work toward their General Education Degree (GED).

The program offers training in several areas including finance and information technology, but one-third of young people in the program, according to Stem, choose a “hard hat trade.”

Creating a Pipeline

Oklahoma, with its three Job Corps centers, has proven to be fertile ground for recruitment. Several times a month, AOGC representatives visit the centers to meet one-on-one with hard hat students and explain the numerous opportunities available in road and bridge construction. “We call this session ‘Construction 101,’” explained Stem.

Interested students then enroll in a four- to six-week “work study” program with an AOGC member firm. Upon completion, they can be permanently placed within that company.

“We have about five to 10 students graduating per month—that’s possibly over 100 kids annually who could come into the industry,” Stem noted.

See *Workforce*, 16

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The program has been so successful that AOGC recently invested in two Caterpillar LITE Simulators. The virtual reality equipment will be brought to Job Corps centers where students will be able to experience operating a compact loader and excavator.

Putting in the Work

Recruiting these young people requires more than just sparking their interest—it often requires earning their trust. Stem says they begin by simply establishing a relationship with an individual.

“It takes a constant presence to gain their trust. Many have never had a solid family structure to rely on,” he explained. “We need to prove we are here for them, and that we are here for the long haul.”

For AOGC, this means investing time outside of the workplace. This past Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, the association rented out an entire movie theater for two groups of Job Corps students who had nowhere to celebrate the holidays. Students and their mentors enjoyed a carefree day of movies.

While the association is pursuing other initiatives to help Oklahoma contractors recruit and retain workers, this has clearly been the most rewarding for everyone involved.

“Not only will we see five to 10 new hires a month, but those are five to 10 lives we can impact. It is truly a win-win,” Stem concluded.

Carolyn Kramer Simons is ARTBA's senior director, state funding policy, and managing director of its Transportation Officials Division.

Editor's Note: For more information about this initiative or to share your own workforce development success story, please email Carolyn Kramer Simons at csimons@artba.org.

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How California's I-10 Upgrades Benefit Commuters and the Environment

Help is on its way for the movement of people and goods in San Bernardino County

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The Inland Empire, the metropolitan area in Southern California where the I-10 comes through, saw its first big growth period in the 1880s with the arrival of the railroad, and the importation of citrus trees, sparking a major citrus boom.

This growth continued through WWII, when the predecessor to the I-10, the Ramona Expressway, was built. By the time the first section off the I-10 was completed in the 1960s, the Inland Empire was well on its way to becoming a major transportation network and shipping hub.

Toyota and Whirlpool established factories in the area, and Amazon launched a regional Amazon air hub. This translates into increased traffic, and potentially more air pollution for the surrounding communities.

Along with the tremendous growth in business has come a continuous expansion of the population. In San Bernardino County alone, the population is expected to grow 30 percent by 2035.



Crews begin widening 11 miles of highway along I-10 near Los Angeles.



An artist's rendering of traffic flowing smoothly once the project is completed.

Today, the I-10 runs from California to Florida (more than 2,460 miles). Lane Construction's work to modernize the I-10 Freeway in San Bernardino will give residents, workers and tourists the continued access they need to live and work in the Inland Empire.

Improving Traffic Flow

In addition to the improvements in traffic flow, Lane is replacing eight bridges, improving eight others with widening, and enhancing two more to increase throughput.

Additional drainage and rebar steel enforced concrete will make all drivers safer due to decreased braking time when it is raining, and a longer life span for the roadway. Help is on its way for the movement of people and goods in San Bernardino County.

I-10 Project by the Numbers

- \$673 million contract
- 10 miles long
- 8 toll points (4 in each direction)
- 300 cubic yards of concrete paving
- 175,000 cubic yards of structural concrete
- 700,000 cubic yards of earthwork
- 80 walls
- 8 bridge replacements
- 15 bridge widenings
- 2 bridge overlays / slight modifications

“The project is expected to reduce congestion and emissions, improve access to transit, improve safety, create jobs, and prepare for future growth in the area and at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.”

– Transportation Today

Jan Sherman, project director for the I-10 Corridor Express Lanes explained some of the complexities of the effort: “There are over 285,000 vehicles traveling in this corridor every day. One of the major challenges is the short duration of time that we have to construct the work but more importantly the phasing and logistics to move the 285 000 vehicles a day in such a tight, constrained area.”

Sustainable Innovation and Improved Quality of Life

When it comes to battling air pollution, California is one of the most progressive states in the nation. Thanks to continuous emission reduction initiatives over the past 30 years, levels of air pollutants have fallen in the state. The improvements being made to the I-10 are helping further California's goals by reducing congestion and emissions.

By enabling travel time savings and improved trip reliability, more companies and people will choose San Bernardino and the surrounding area to settle. Less time going to and from work means improving the quality of many lives.

“With the expected growth and demand on transportation in the next 25 years, these added express lanes will help provide a more reliable commute and ease congestion,” added Sherman.

CONTACT

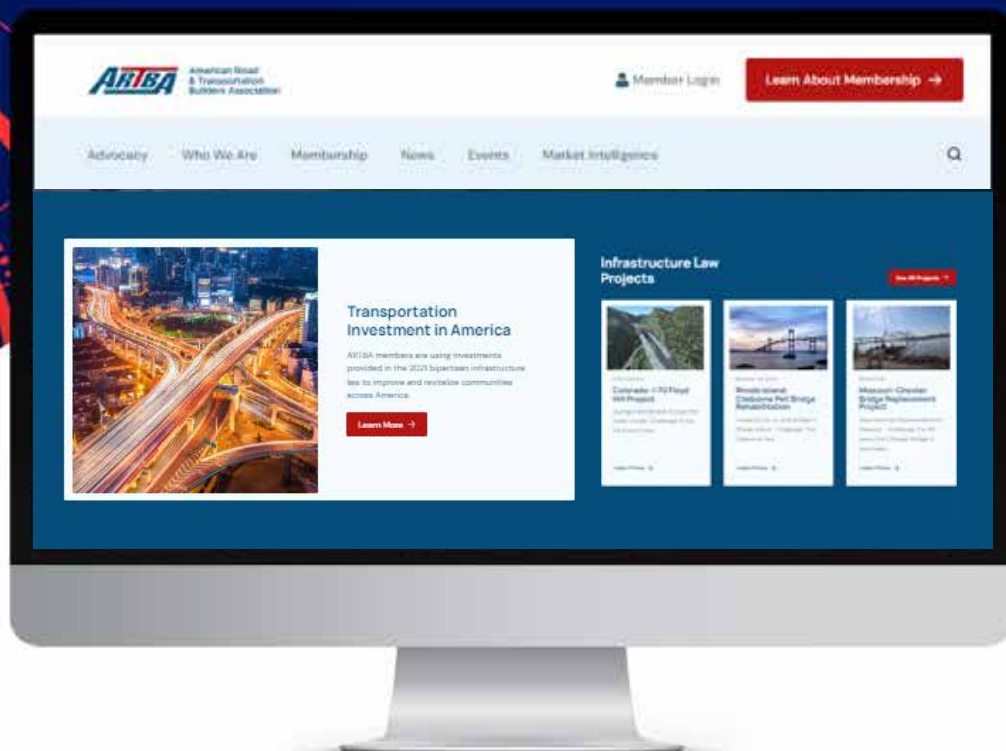
Lauralee Heckman, director of communications,
The Lane Construction Corporation
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Changing of the Guard at CIM



John Pourbaix Retires After 45 Years

BY RICH JULIANO
rjuliano@artba.org

In January, after nearly half-century of service, John Pourbaix stepped down as leader of the Construction Industries of Massachusetts (CIM). Pourbaix began his career with CIM in 1978 as director of government activities and in 1994 was promoted to executive director.

During his tenure, Pourbaix became known as a leading voice for the heavy construction industry in Massachusetts and beyond, working with local, state and federal leaders to modernize infrastructure in the Bay State. He worked productively with elected officials of both parties and helped steer the industry through milestones like the Central Artery megaproject in Boston.

"John has been integral to the growth of CIM and in securing billions of dollars to improve our state's road, bridge, and rail infrastructure," said CIM Chairman Bob Pereira, chairman and chief executive officer of The Middlesex Corporation.

"John was a tremendous positive influence on all fronts," added Mike Socci, owner of MAS Building & Bridge, Inc., a past CIM chairman and current ARTBA Board member. "His unique ability to patiently hear the needs of the many strong contractor personalities that make up CIM, and to filter those needs into a professional, well received message by agencies, owners and politicians as well, was invaluable."

On the national level, Pourbaix participated extensively in his peer group, the ARTBA Council of State Executives (CSE). He shared lessons learned from his decades of industry advocacy, while flagging emerging issues for attention from ARTBA and the other state associations.

Bob Latham, executive vice president of the Associated Pennsylvania Constructors, said Pourbaix was a natural leader. "Over the years, John has not only been a trusted colleague, but also a close friend. John was always a steady hand during CSE discussions. Whenever he spoke, like the old EF Hutton ads, people listened because they knew they were about to learn something important," Latham explained.

For his many industry contributions, Pourbaix received the Nello L. Teer, Jr. Award from ARTBA's Contractors Division last fall at the association's National Convention in La Jolla,



Pourbaix (second from left) was awarded ARTBA's Nello L. Teer, Jr. Award in September. Also pictured, from left: Bob Latham, Ken Rezendes, and Kent Starwalt.

Calif. In making the presentation, Kent Starwalt, executive vice president of the Tennessee Road Builders Association, said he had learned much from Pourbaix because he "always asked the right questions" in CSE roundtables.

John Pourbaix and his wife Sue were regulars at ARTBA meetings for decades, often bringing along their children Danielle and Jay, who are now well into their own careers. Retirement will free John up for more time at their beloved Cape Cod and continued adventures on golf courses far and wide.



Jeff Mahoney

The same day CIM announced Pourbaix's retirement, it also named his replacement, Jeff Mahoney.

"I've known Jeff for many years and with his experience and skill set, I'm confident he will be a great leader for CIM," said Pourbaix.

Mahoney is no stranger to government relations or association leadership. He has worked with the Utility Contractors Association of New England (UCANE) since 2015 and served as its executive director for the last three years. Prior to UCANE, Mahoney served as district representative for U.S. Congressman Stephen F. Lynch and chief of staff for the State House of Representatives Majority Leader, and as a Massachusetts Deputy Inspector General.

"I am extremely grateful to the Board for this opportunity and am excited to get started," said Mahoney. "John has been a friend and mentor over the years, and I look forward to continuing his work of dedicated advocacy on behalf of the membership and the industry to ensure these critical infrastructure projects built by CIM contractors are put out to bid and completed."

Rich Juliano is ARTBA's general counsel.



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New Ideas in the Old Dominion

Stephen Brich was named commissioner of the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) in January 2018, taking control of the third largest highway agency in the country. He oversees a \$7 billion annual budget and a team of 7,700 people responsible for designing, building, maintaining, and operating the state's more than 59,000 miles of roadway, 21,000 structures and bridges, six tunnels and three ferry systems.

Brich has 26 years of experience specializing in traffic engineering, safety, operations, transportation planning and research. Prior to VDOT, he was vice president at a major consultant's operation with responsibility for leading strategic planning relating to surface transportation.

The commissioner sat down with ARTBA Vice President of Public Affairs John Schneidawind for an extensive interview on the Commonwealth's transportation goals. Here's an edited transcript of that conversation.

Q: Can you give us a snapshot of the state's transportation program?

A: So just for a quick overview, for Virginia over the last six to seven years, we've almost doubled the size of our program overall for construction, and we've gone from roughly \$10.4 billion to \$19.6 billion. I want to say from 3,700 projects to 4,700 projects. And that doesn't include our P3 program.

The state, recognizing that at the time the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) was just being contemplated, everyone was of the opinion that nothing was going to get done. So, Virginia took it upon itself to "right size" our Commonwealth transportation fund and increased that fund quite significantly, indexing to the Consumer Price Index—the gas tax. We took a look at our retail sales tax and our motor vehicle registrations—those are the big three tax sources that Virginia has—and we restructured that program. In August 2021, it passed our General Assembly.

Q: Now that we are in year-three of the IIJA, how have the historic levels of new federal investment helped shape your state program?

A: I won't dismiss the IIJA because certainly that is a source of funds, but when I look at the federal program overall and

its impact back to Virginia and being in an uplift of 20 percent, it was not as significant as the state's additional revenue we were able to create.

Now having said all that, we know that as IIJA came on board—and coming out of COVID—inflation ran hot, very hot. And so, when we have inflation running on some commodities of almost a 50 percent increase, and with labor costs soaring, it really took a toll. For example, at the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel, we're consuming one-third of the stainless steel in the country. And so, if it wasn't for the IIJA and if it wasn't for the state resources, we would have a reduction in our program... We didn't stop our projects; and we kept our workforce working.

Starting in spring 2021, we were already putting together a five-year plan of what bridge investment would look like over and above our bridge formula program already in place. As a result, in January 2022, we were able to take to our board the first year's sets of projects to be able to advance those monies—which is less than 60 days of the president inking the IIJA—and having a set of projects that were ready to go.

See Q&A, 24

Q: How are you balancing demands for new capacity with the need to maintain and improve existing facilities?

A: In Virginia, we have two sets of program areas—construction and maintenance. We have a SMART SCALE program that prioritizes projects across the state based upon congestion, safety, the environment, economic development, and opportunities. So, there's five sets of criteria. Virginia requires that we're a maintenance first organization, or a maintenance first state. And when we have maintenance needs that exceed the budgets that we put aside for the maintenance program, we have something called crossover, which takes monies out of the construction program, builds it into the maintenance program for that year to make the maintenance program whole.

Q: What role does alternative delivery play in your program and how do you see these methods developing in Virginia?

A: I think we can classify alternative delivery in a couple of different ways. The P3 development and delivery model is one mechanism, but we also have a very robust design-build program.

We're looking at the P3 program for major initiatives that have regional significance, but also can attract private investment to solve a regional issue. In many of the cases that we've been very successful with in Virginia, we're looking at models that do not require a public subsidy for major system enhancements. What I mean by that is really looking at the Express Lanes or HOT lanes and expansion of the HOT lane network that'll provide alternative mode choice to travelers, while still giving a free option to those who elect not to take that facility. In Northern Virginia alone, we have nearly 90 miles of Express Lane networks in operation, and we're

looking at about another five or six miles to be able to close off from Springfield interchange to the Woodrow Wilson Bridge.

We're looking at a unique project on Interstate 95 from Springfield to Opitz Boulevard to take the reversible roadway in that section and turn it into two-way traffic to create bidirectionality in that segment.

We just opened up the Fredericksburg extension, which is another 10 miles, and that's operating beautifully. We're seeing travel time savings of 30 minutes to those people who take the Express Lanes and 20 minutes travel time savings for those that are in general purpose lane. So, it's really been a big benefit back to both those who are willing to pay for it and those who remain in the general-purpose lanes.

Q: What about design-build?

A: We have a very robust design-build program. When I came on board, we were very heavily design-build-oriented and that was really to get projects out the door faster, allow the contractor to have innovation as well as share risk back to the project. But what we see is that when we do a lot of predominantly design-builds in the Commonwealth, whether it be our engineers or the consulting engineers that do not play within the design-build space—we tend to lose the skill sets that are needed for the design on the Interstate systems. And I'd say most of our design-build work is on the Interstate system.

So, in an attempt to be able to make sure that they're qualified consultants out there to do the design work and not just the design-build engineers, we've taken a much more balanced approach. This year alone, I think we're going to do about more than a billion dollars in design-build projects itself. And if I look at the other lettings that we have, it's about \$2 billion in regular construction. So, about a third of our program is going to be design-build, which are major, major projects.

Q: What trends are you seeing in your workforce and what are you doing to attract and retain talent?

A: Workforce needs are a challenge and continue to be a challenge for many in the construction industry. The trends are clear across the board: everyone's fighting for the same talent whether it's the consultant industry, the contracting industry, our labor workforce, ourselves, the maintenance guys, or transportation operators that are using heavy equipment. Everyone's fighting for the same resources.

During COVID, there was a very strong challenge from Amazon for anyone that had a commercial driver's license, to be able to deliver packages. We were fighting for the same



I-66 Express Lanes outside the Beltway in Northern Virginia. Photo from ride66express.com.

See Q&A, 26

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talent. Why go out and plow snow for a set salary when you can be in a warm vehicle and delivering packages by yourself at twice to three times the salary that you were making as an operator? During that time period, we really saw an exodus, and we frankly had to increase our salaries for those individuals to retain them but also come back to the workforce.

We're also seeing that millennials are starting to enter the workforce more. We're going to see them work for us anywhere between three to seven years. When we have someone with three to seven years coming and going into an agency that has prided itself on long term sustainability of its employees and has passed down knowledge or has gained knowledge over a period of time, that becomes a challenge for us on multiple levels.

It's how we recruit people, how we retain those people and more importantly how do we provide knowledge or pass the knowledge down to those new employees or to the consultants and contractors working for us. We've just finished up our fiscal year 2024-26 business plan, and we have one whole section that deals with strengthening our workforce, from the recruitment end, to the retention end, to the knowledge transference end.

Q: What are some ways that you stay in touch and work with the industry in your state?

A: I'd say we have a very good relationship with both our consulting industry representatives and our contractors. One of the things that I've done to foster that relationship is if they ever have an issue, they can certainly pick up the phone and call or if they have a burning issue that falls outside of a

regular meeting, we'll champion a small group of people to get around the table and whiteboard an issue. Can they deliver the program that we have? That's what keeps me up at night.

And for the most part, it's that open dialogue that has really come a long way to making sure that we're in touch with industry and industry is in touch with us. Gordon Dixon from the Virginia Transportation Construction Alliance and I have a standing call every two weeks—it might be two minutes; it might be 30 minutes. But at least we're able to touch base.

Q: When you started out in your career, did you envision yourself running a state transportation agency?

A: I never thought that I'd to be a commissioner of VDOT at any point in my career up until I was asked if I would consider it.

One of the things I've told the younger staff or new people coming into the organization is to learn something about everything and understand it. It's more than just engineering. There's social science, but also partly business. One of the best things I did was go outside of the DOT and get private sector experience and be able to bring that business mindset back to the organization and at least think of things in a different way rather than the standard way at VDOT.

Q: You sound like a private sector guy, you don't sound like somebody who's grown up in the in the regulatory environment.

A: I have more time in VDOT than I have in the private sector, but maybe the private sector was a lot harder on me and so I've got dog years on that one.

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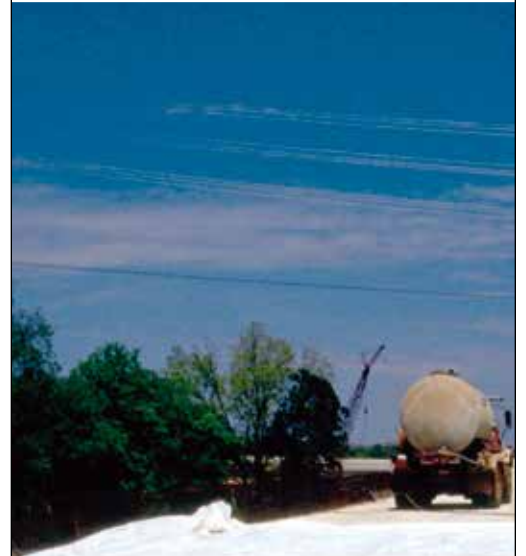
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Application Deadline: April 19 artbafoundation.org

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2023 ARTBA Annual Report Summary

Message from the Chairman



TIM DUIT

Duit Construction Co., Inc.
Edmond, Okla.

In 2023, ARTBA's primary advocacy focus was year-two implementation of the landmark Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).

This meant working with congressional allies to help secure \$106 billion in federal highway, public transit and airport investment that is being felt in the construction marketplace. It also meant continuing to push for the implementation of IIJA's policy provisions with a goal of ensuring more efficient project delivery, as intended by Congress.

At the same time, ARTBA was looking down the road. We began laying the groundwork for the next multi-year highway and public transit reauthorization bill, due in fall 2026. The association launched an external communications campaign to tell the story of how federal infrastructure dollars are being used to improve mobility, safety, quality of life and economic opportunity in every state and congressional district in America. This effort featured site visits with members of Congress, project tours and briefings for 100 Capitol Hill staff, and production of 60 written stories and short-form videos for social media highlighting select IIJA projects.

Among other notable activities aimed at serving our members' interests, we:

- Provided learning, networking, business development opportunities, and safety training to 3,600 industry professionals.
- Filed 30 sets of comments with federal agencies on proposed regulations.

Special thanks to ARTBA members and state contractor chapter executives for your personal leadership, engagement, and financial support during 2023. You helped make possible the many achievements highlighted on the opposite page. To learn more about these accomplishments, read the full 2023 ARTBA Annual Report—available at artba.org.



TMAW SUPPORTERS

ARTBA's Transportation Makes America Work (TMAW) program helped drive the industry's legislative, regulatory, legal, and communications agenda related to the IIJA. Thanks to the following 2023 supporters:

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American Road
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2023 In Review

Advocacy

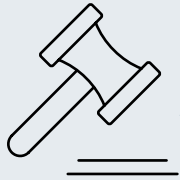
\$106 billion

FY 2023 federal highway, public transit, and airport investment.



61,000

Transportation projects initiated by states in past two years.



30

Sets of comments filed with agencies on proposed regulations.

100

Congressional staff participating in IIJA implementation progress briefings.



900

Visits to **transpoinfo.org** by congressional staff to access state-specific data.



60

Written and video profiles of IIJA success stories distributed externally.

Meetings & Member Services

4.8*



ARTBA member rated experience at National Convention.

*on a scale of 5

2,000

Executives taking advantage of learning, networking, and business development opportunities via meetings and webinars.



1,600

Professionals receiving roadway construction-specific safety training.



450

Subscribers making smart business decisions thanks to the transportation construction market intelligence service.

\$100K

Direct financial aid from ARTBA's Foundation to families who lost loved ones in work zone incidents and to support college education of worthy students.



17,500

Followers on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

2023 ARTBA Foundation Annual Report Highlights

Message from the Foundation Chairman



PAUL YAROSS
HNTB
New York, N.Y.

In 2023, the ARTBA Foundation had its most impactful year in recent memory for three key reasons.

First, thanks to generous contributions from the Board of Trustees and other industry professionals, the Foundation provided \$100K in direct financial aid, including for the first-time supporting multiple university or graduate students pursuing transportation construction careers. We made a major donation to support the families of the six industry workers killed in a tragic highway work zone intrusion near Baltimore. We also delivered scholarships to the children of highway workers killed or disabled on the job.

Second, the Foundation expanded the reach and scope of its 25-year-old highway worker scholarship fund. Beginning in 2024, the renamed Lanford Family Transportation Construction Worker Memorial ScholarshipSM will extend post-high school financial assistance to the children of workers killed or permanently disabled while working on projects in these sectors: airports, bridges, marine, ports and waterways, public transit, roads, railroads, tunnels, and utilities.

Stan Lanford, who launched the fund with his brother Jack, noted that it was the right time to expand the scholarship because the increased investments from the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA) will create many new project sites that put more transportation construction workers at risk.

Third, 1,600 industry professionals received safety training. Protecting the health and well-being of our workforce is one of the most important services the Foundation offers.

Special thanks to ARTBA's members for your continued engagement, the Board of Trustees for its ongoing leadership, and to our donors—listed on the opposite page—for their financial support. To learn more about what was accomplished last year, check out the 2023 Foundation Annual Report at artbafoundation.org.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Yarossi". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Paul" and last name "Yarossi" clearly legible.

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Charles Potts, chairman of the board, Heritage Construction & Materials

An aerial photograph of a city skyline, likely Atlanta, Georgia, featuring several prominent skyscrapers. In the foreground, a complex multi-level highway interchange with several overpasses is visible, with cars traveling on the roads. The sky is clear and blue.

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Fifth in an ongoing series highlighting the real-world benefits of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).



Challenge: Route 1 in Bucks County, Pa., also known as Lincoln Highway, was showing its age. The busy four-lane highway which connects communities and industrial centers with Philly to the south and Trenton, N.J., to the north was constructed in the 1960s. A patchwork of filled-in potholes, ramps that leave little room to merge, an overpass with low vertical clearance, and outdated median barriers make the drive unpleasant and sometimes scary. Backups are common and the area has long outgrown the 60-year-old highway. For over a decade, local officials talked about the need to modernize this critical artery and bring it up to today's mobility and safety standards.

Solution: With help from the federal infrastructure law, this heavily traveled, four-mile stretch of Route 1 is getting more than a facelift. It is undergoing a total transformation. The U.S. 1 Corridor Improvement Project, which is being completed in three stages, will address safety issues by closing the intermediate access crossovers between the frontage roads and U.S. 1 which are known to have a high crash frequency. Crews will also replace outdated concrete separators with 12-foot to 14-foot-wide paved shoulders and new median barriers. Lastly, the project replaces the remaining three overpasses on U.S. 1 between I-295 and the I-276 (PA Turnpike) that have deficient vertical clearance, which reduces the likelihood of vehicles striking the overpasses. The project will reduce congestion and improve safety by providing an additional travel lane in each direction. For Bucks County residents, and everyone who relies on this highway, a much smoother and much safer ride is just ahead.

What They're Saying: "The project will reduce congestion and improve safety by providing an additional travel lane in each direction. It will also replace aging infrastructure and provide an updated modern facility for current and future traffic." - Brad Rudolph, PennDOT spokesman (*Construction Equipment Guide*, 3/9/23)

- **Total Cost:**
Approximately
\$110.8 million
(Segment 2)
- **IJJA Funds:**
\$26.5 million
- **Contractors:**
J.D. Eckman
Inc., Atglen PA
(Segment 2)
- **Start Date:**
2021 (Segment 2)
- **End Date:**
2026 (Segment 2)



What They're Saying: "From a safety point of view, it's nice. I like that the road is not so narrow anymore. All the new things that were implemented in this project are a plus, new signage, new fencing and guardrail." - Anna One Star, Tribal transportation planner, Rosebud Sioux Tribe

- If you have an IIJA project that should be featured, please contact ARTBA's Beth McGinn at bmcginn@artba.org.**

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Regulatory Roundup

ARTBA's 2024 Regulatory Forecast: Cloudy and About to Pour

BY PRIANKA SHARMA
psharma@artba.org

When it comes to predicting the weather, meteorologists have a pretty good grasp. The same cannot always be said for the regulatory landscape. While meteorologists track trends and weather patterns, regulatory affairs professionals track agency priorities, and Executive Orders.

What am I tracking this year? My Doppler radar is the Unified Regulatory Agenda, released twice yearly in coordination with the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA). This document lists upcoming regulations and sometimes includes timelines. For instance, in the latest fall agenda, the Mine Safety and Health Administration signaled that it plans to finalize its respirable silica safety standards by April 2024. With the draft final rule already under OIRA review (the last step before finalization), it seems the agency is on track to meet this target. Other pending final rules at OIRA include Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) worker walkaround, and Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Phase Two.

Some Key Rules to Watch:

'Deadlines are taken from the recent Unified Regulatory Agenda.

Agency	Rule Name	Stage	Intended Deadline
CEQ	NEPA Phase Two	Final Rule	April
FHWA	Buy America Waiver for Manufactured Products	Proposed Rule	February?
DOT	DBE	Final Rule	February
EPA	Air Emissions Reporting Requirements	Final Rule	July
OSHA	Heat Safety Standard	Proposed Rule	January (late)
MSHA	Respirable Silica	Final Rule	April
FWS	Endangered Species Act Revisions	Final Rules	April
OSHA	Worker Walkaround	Final Rule	No timeline provided

ARTBA is monitoring several other rule changes expected this spring. Some have been in development for years (the U.S. Department of Transportation's Disadvantaged Business Enterprise [DBE] rule revisions), while others were proposed last summer (NEPA Phase Two). And some are considered high priority for the administration (OSHA's heat safety standards). In an election year, it's not uncommon for agencies to expedite regulations that further the administration's political priorities. For rules where ARTBA has offered comment, we hope they consider our recommendations. But due to the tight timelines, we are preparing for many significant rules to be finalized largely unchanged.

The Courts

Two recent developments impacting rulemaking are a pair of Supreme Court cases, *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo* and *Relentless v. Department of Commerce*, challenging the *Chevron* doctrine. Named for yet another Supreme Court case, *Chevron* allows agencies to interpret vague laws by creating a two-part test: (1) determine whether Congress has already spoken on the issue; (2) determine if the statute is ambiguous or silent and therefore open to reasonable interpretation. This doctrine has been both useful and abused, enabling sound policies but also stretching an agency's authority. The cases were argued in mid-January, and a decision is expected this summer. Whatever the outcome, the future of rulemaking will be significantly impacted.

Unfortunately, unlike your local weather forecaster, my outlook at this stage is highly uncertain. What I can confidently predict is that we should all be prepared with umbrellas. Because if 2023 is any indication, 2024 is likely to bring a deluge of regulations.

Prianka Sharma is ARTBA vice president and counsel for regulatory affairs.

Oklahoma Contractor Tim Duit joined ARTBA because of its singular focus.



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Highway, public transit, airport, rail, port and waterway design, construction and maintenance generates \$650 billion in annual economic activity and sustains 4.4 million U.S. jobs.

ARTBA and its members:

- Led the industry charge resulting in 2021's Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act—the largest federal surface transportation funding law since the 1956 Interstate system.
- Have helped advance \$58 billion in approved, yet challenged, U.S. transportation projects via strong regulatory and environmental legal advocacy programs.

To meet today's business challenges, you need an organization singularly focused on your interests.

Contact **Allison Klein** at **202.683.1036** or **aklein@artba.org** to learn more about membership.



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ARTBA On the Road

Two UTCA of New Jersey executives were in the Nation's Capital Feb. 5-6 to meet with ARTBA staff and members of their congressional delegation. Pictured left to right: ARTBA General Counsel **Rich Juliano**, ARTBA President and CEO **Dave Bauer**, UTCA Executive Director **Dave Rible** and UTCA Director of Governmental Affairs & Communications **Ryan Sharpe**.



The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) invited ARTBA and several member firms to attend a special briefing and discussion on upcoming funding opportunities Dec. 7 in Washington, D.C. Among those joining FRA Administrator **Amit Bose** (center) were **Aaron Singer** of AECOM (left) and **Charlie Kilpatrick** of Lane Construction (right).



Bauer (second from right) participated in a Feb. 7 panel session at the AASHTO Washington Briefing. He was joined by (from left): **Jeff Cleland** (Amazon), **Nancy Daubenberger** (Minnesota DOT), and **Carlos Bracer** (Utah DOT).



ARTBA Chair **Tim Duit** (Duit Construction Co., Inc.), left, Feb. 8 presented **Vince Hafeli** (Ajax Paving Industries of Florida) with the 2023 ARTBA Award during the Florida Transportation Builders' Association Construction Conference in Orlando. It is the association's highest honor.



In early December, ARTBA welcomed Alabama Road Builders Association Executive Director **Skip Powe** to the Nation's Capital for briefings on federal issues and visits to his state's congressional offices. His Capitol Hill meetings included a discussion on Alabama's transportation priorities with **Sen. Katie Britt (R)**.



Thirty transportation construction industry professionals completed safety training at Long Island Contractors' Association (LICA) headquarters Jan. 11, conducted by ARTBA Senior Vice President of Safety and Education **Brad Sant**.



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WORLD OF ASPHALT, AGG1 2024 RETURN TO NASHVILLE

World of Asphalt Show & Conference and the co-located AGG1 Academy & Expo, running March 25-27, 2024, at the Nashville Music City Center in Nashville, Tenn., boasts more than 400 exhibitors and more than 200,000 square feet of exhibits. The 2024 show is expected to be among the biggest in its history.

“We’re looking forward to returning to Nashville to bring the asphalt and aggregates industries together again to showcase the latest products and innovations all in one place,” said World of Asphalt Show Director Brittany Schmidtke. “Additionally, we are expanding this year’s show to include more networking and educational opportunities than were available at the record-breaking previous show.”

How to Register:

For the ultimate World of Asphalt and AGG1 experience, opt for the All-Access badge, granting daily entry to both World of Asphalt and AGG1, along with access to up to 10 concurrent education sessions.

Travel accommodations can then be booked through the official World of Asphalt and AGG1 hotel block that provides access to the show’s rate assurance without the need to pre-pay.

Finally, enroll in education to secure your spot. Education topics include people, plants, paving, pavement preservation and environment, health, safety and sustainability (EHS&S).

And while it is still a few weeks away, we recommend preparing for your visit. With more than 400 exhibitors and just three days to explore everything, attendees are encouraged to organize their schedule for World of Asphalt and AGG1 ahead of their arrival in Nashville. Additionally, remember to plan Nashville experiences for time spent off the show floor.

“The 2024 AGG1 Aggregates Academy & Expo will foster a unique environment of professional networking along with the latest in industry education,” said Michael Johnson, president & CEO of the National Stone, Sand and Gravel Association (NSSGA). “Everyone should have AGG1 on their calendars, since the show creates the largest annual gathering of industry producers and those in the manufacturing and services space.”

Education Lineup For 2024 Return

World of Asphalt and AGG1 Aggregates Academy & Expo education program calendar, showcases 120 education sessions



at the upcoming show and conference. This includes the most popular sessions asphalt paving professionals and aggregates experts can use to build their businesses and skillsets.

“We’re proud of the educational lineup we have assembled for the asphalt paving industry,” Schmidtke said. “We listen to what the industry and our attendees are saying about what they need, and make sure to have it.”

The World of Asphalt education conference, called the People, Plants and Paving Conference by the National Asphalt Pavement Association (NAPA) is divided into five different education tracks: **People:** Focuses on the important skills necessary to maximize job performance.

Plants: Experts will evaluate and improve plant performance and keep the plant operating at peak levels.

Paving: Learn important techniques to construct safe and smooth quality pavements at optimum efficiency and enhanced profitability.

Pavement Preservation: Learn techniques used to extend the life of pavements such as seal coats, in-place recycling, and crack sealing.

EHS&S: Obtain the tools, best practices, and innovations to build a world-class EHS&S culture.

Additionally, the AGG1 Academy has four different tracks of its own:

- Operations & Production
- Safety & Health
- Business & People Management
- Environment & Sustainability

All 120 of the of the education Sessions offer important, engaging content for asphalt professionals.

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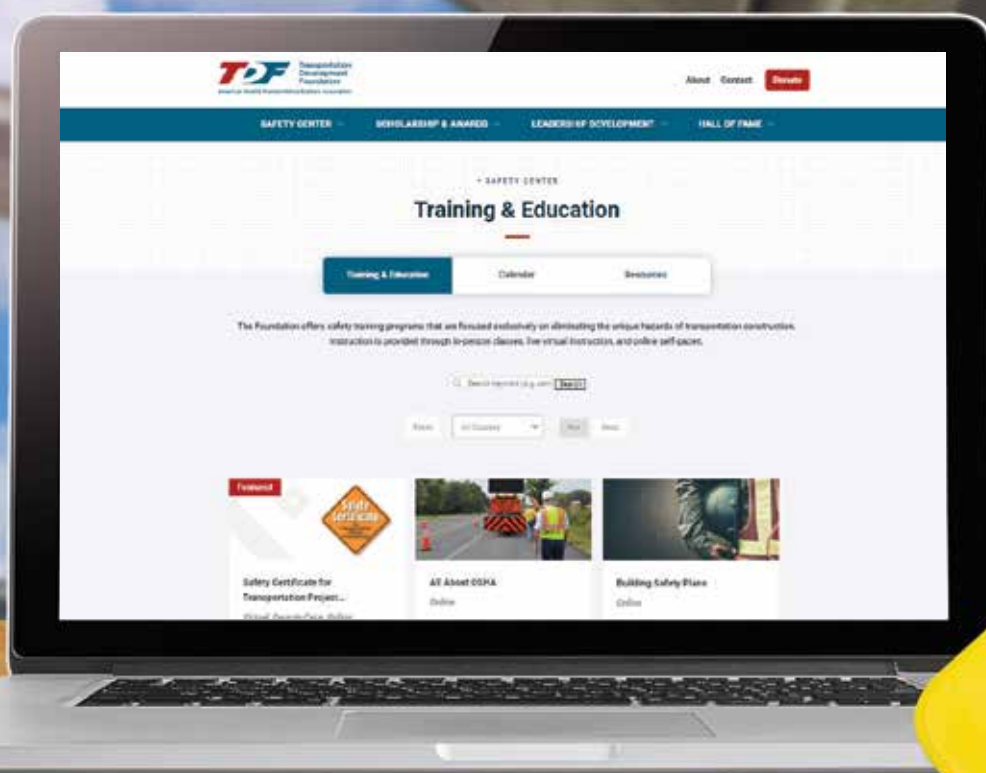
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John Deere's Vision for AI in Road Building

BY JOHN SCHNEIDAWIND
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One threat posed by the pell-mell rush into artificial intelligence (AI) is its potential to replace workers. But as transportation construction continues to suffer through a workforce shortage, John Deere is touting AI as a workforce multiplier.

President Joe Biden signed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) in 2021, giving surface transportation investment a \$450 billion boost. And yet, chronic workforce shortages plague the construction sector—including in road and bridge building—as workers continue to leave the industry at faster clips than they're being hired.

Meanwhile, the market for AI technology in construction is projected to boom. According to Adroit Market Research, the global market for AI in construction was estimated in 2022 to be worth \$1.3 billion, and by 2030, it is anticipated to grow to \$13.05 billion, a compound annual growth rate of 36 percent. Of all the regions analyzed (North America, Europe, Asia Pacific, Middle East and Africa, and South America), North America is expected to hold the largest market share.

The growing market enthusiasm for this technology is driven by its endless number of applications, which in the construction market include everything from risk and asset management to supply chain optimization and project scheduling.

AI is not magic. It simply uses available data sets to make complicated calculations and predictions in seconds, much like the human brain. Its ability to analyze massive amounts of data quickly allows businesses to automate tasks that lead to greater efficiency, increased productivity, and sometimes even enhanced safety.

John Deere showcased examples of these attributes at January's Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas. According to Maryanne Graves, John Deere's global manager of production systems and product management, the emphasis is on using John Deere's "See and Spray" AI technology in machines ranging from crop spraying equipment to loaders.



John Deere's SmartGrade™ motor grader. Photo courtesy of John Deere.

"Using AI, machine learning, computer vision, and putting cameras on the boom behind a sprayer, instead of broadcast spraying a field, we're now training that system to recognize weeds versus plants, and only spray weeds," Graves said. "What was cool to talk about at CES is how John Deere is positioned to pull all of the technology from the AG side of the business into construction and road building."

When it comes to safety on transportation construction sites, that ability to differentiate is crucial. In a tight transportation construction market—with fewer available workers qualified in operating conventional construction equipment—AI technology is becoming indispensable.

"If you think about the problems we're trying to solve for our customers, it's lack of skilled labor, it's jobsite safety, it's keeping people safe, and sending them home the way that they came to work every day, and really doing more with less," Graves said.

"If we key in on that jobsite safety, and how we can leverage AI, now instead of detecting weeds versus plants in a field, we're detecting humans versus drivable space on a construction site," she said.

See AI, 42

On transportation construction sites, the AI benefits are two-fold. With AI technology handling complex tasks, it relieves equipment operators from having to monitor where workers are, and instead concentrate more on simply performing a task. It also means contractors don't have to train operators for hours on every aspect of equipment operation, which in turn increases the pool of available job candidates from which to choose.

"Our loaders are spending 40 percent of their life in reverse," Graves said. "We want to make the operator in the seat more aware of what's happening around them, so we need that operator to be able to focus on the task at hand—which is moving the material—but they also need to be acutely aware of what's happening around their machine."

John Deere has spent hours on jobsites talking with operators about their jobs.

"So, when we've been on construction sites and I've talked to operators, I ask them 'do you want us to show you what's there?'" Graves explains, "and they would say 'well I have a bucket full of material that I'm trying to get in this truck, and then I'm going to throw this machine into reverse and go back to the pile. I can't be looking at a screen; I need to look at the loading tool.'"

John Deere uses algorithms that enable the machine to recognize what the camera is seeing, training cameras—not the operators—to recognize whether it's a worker behind a machine that's about to go into reverse, or just a garbage can.

"We're going to give (the operator) a unique tone when there's a person that walks behind their machine," Graves said. "That's where the AI comes in."

It's not just jobsite safety AI can help improve. It's also more accurate paving and road construction. Operators don't have to worry about manually adjusting grader blades to different pavement angles; the machine does it for them.

Thornton, Ill.-based Gallagher Asphalt Corp. is using John Deere pavers and motor graders on subdivision sites in the Chicago metropolitan area.

"Putting stone down and cutting dirt to millimeter tolerance has been awesome for us mainly because we can put less experienced operators in there," said Jon Gallagher, the company's vice president of pre-construction. "They don't need that 30 years of training to get in the seat and do a pretty good job."

John Schneidawind is ARTBA's vice president of public affairs.

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