



## International Right of Way Association Weekly Update

Monday, March 20, 2017

### Trump Administration

- As expected, President Trump released the “skinny” budget proposal for fiscal year 2018 on Thursday (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget>). This budget blueprint proposes raising military spending by \$54 billion and offsetting that increase by cutting budgets for 18 other agencies, including the Department of Transportation ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/trump-federal-budget-2018-massive-cuts-to-the-arts-science-and-the-poor/2017/03/15/0a0a0094-09a1-11e7-a15f-a58d4a988474\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/trump-federal-budget-2018-massive-cuts-to-the-arts-science-and-the-poor/2017/03/15/0a0a0094-09a1-11e7-a15f-a58d4a988474_story.html)). The President proposes cutting the Department of Transportation budget by roughly 13 percent, including cuts to Federal Transit Administration capital investment grants, Amtrak, and Essential Air Service, elimination of the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Program, and calls to privatize air traffic control services (<http://thehill.com/policy/transportation/324248-trump-budget-proposes-13-percent-cut-to-department-of-transportation>).

### Analysis

- The first thing to remember when analyzing the potential impact of a President’s budget proposal is that it is precisely that—a proposal. Congress adopts budget resolutions that do not have the force of law, but which set the parameters for annual appropriations legislation. Before Congress adopts a budget resolution, the President will submit his budget proposal for Congress to consider. These budget proposals, however, offer a glimpse into the policy priorities and agendas of the Administration.
- While there is limited detail in the skinny budget proposal, it does provide information about the philosophy that will guide Department of Transportation programs and operations under this Administration. The introductory comment regarding the Department of Transportation in the skinny budget proposal reads as follows:

*The Department of Transportation (DOT) is responsible for ensuring a fast, safe, efficient, accessible, and convenient transportation system that meets our vital national interests and enhances the quality of life of the American people today, and into the future. The Budget request reflects a streamlined DOT that is focused on performing vital Federal safety oversight functions and investing in nationally and regionally significant transportation infrastructure projects. The Budget reduces or*

*eliminates programs that are either inefficient, duplicative of other Federal efforts, or that involve activities that are better delivered by States, localities, or the private sector.*

- There are a number of noteworthy items in this statement. First, the emphasis on vital national interests in the first sentence and the recognition that States, localities, and the private sector can better deliver certain activities than the federal government demonstrates that this Administration views the federal role in infrastructure as a limited one. The debate over the appropriate federal role has long raged on Capitol Hill, and the Administration took the unambiguous position that there are limits to what the federal government should support. Second, the recognition that the Department of Transportation, as an organization, can be streamlined also speaks to the fact that the Administration will not support the status quo without being first convinced that there is no better way. This view of the federal role and philosophy about organizational efficiency will likely shape the development of the Administration's infrastructure proposal.