Federal Priorities for the 116th Congress

Infrastructure Priorities

Broadband and Telecommunications

- NATaT supports efforts to ensure that all households have access to high-speed broadband with a primary focus of deployment in non-urban, rural areas where access is the most limited.

- NATaT supports the Administration and Congress as they prioritize increased funding for broadband deployment. However, NATaT wants to ensure that our unserved and underserved areas remain economically viable by requiring a minimum, affordable speed of no less than 25 Mbps/3 Mbps (download/upload).

- NATaT supports efforts to improve broadband mapping. Current broadband maps are inadequate and do not accurately depict broadband service.

- NATaT supports efforts to streamline deployment without preempting local control over local siting decisions and time to review applications – tenets of a community’s right to self-govern.

- NATaT opposes FCC proposed rules that would permit cable operators to reduce their franchise fee payments by the fair market value of their non-cash “in-kind” contributions (e.g., use of cable facilities or equipment).

- NATaT supports the efforts of the Rural Broadband Caucus in both the House and Senate to facilitate discussion, educate Members of Congress, and develop policy solutions to close the digital divide in rural America.

Transportation

- Towns and townships do not receive transportation funding directly from the federal government, unless they are recipients of a competitive grant award. In Pennsylvania, for example, townships manage 64 percent of the state’s total road miles, but receive less than 1 percent of federal funds. As Congress reauthorizes the FAST Act, NATaT supports efforts to provide direct federal funding to local governments, not just state departments of transportation. Otherwise, those funds never reach towns and townships where, like in Pennsylvania, the roads are managed.

- As Congress works on FAST Act reauthorization, NATaT supports preserving the current 15 percent set-aside for off-system bridges.

- NATaT supports streamlining and shortening the federal permitting process for transportation projects while still requiring environmental stewardship.
NATaT supports the Administration’s priority for funding projects in rural areas through its competitive grant programs. However, NATaT wants to ensure that the federal Department of Transportation understands the reality of the current “rural” definition, which is an area that is outside an urbanized area with a population of over 200,000. To our nation’s towns and townships, 200,000 is not “rural.”

As Congress reauthorizes the FAST Act, NATaT wants to ensure that any effort to impose vehicle miles traveled fees takes into account the limited transportation options for rural residents and the resulting need to use their vehicles to access work and daily services.

NATaT opposes efforts to increase the national truck weight limit on the federal highway system, and efforts to allow longer, wider double- and triple-trailer trucks on federal highways.

**Tax Priorities**

NATaT supports Congressional efforts to provide small tax incentives to recruit and retain local government emergency first responders. Volunteer firefighters alone save communities of all sizes $129 billion a year, and represent 71% of all firefighters in the U.S. Of the total number of volunteer firefighters, 95% service communities with a population of 25,000 or less.

NATaT supports continued efforts to repeal the “Cadillac Tax,” which imposes a 40% excise tax on certain employer-provided healthcare plans. Implementation of the tax has been extended to 2020.

NATaT supports preserving the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds that have helped build public infrastructure for more than 200 years. These bonds enable state and local governments to access necessary capital for critical infrastructure projects. NATaT also supports reinstating advance refunding bonds to allow a community to refinance a municipal bond and maintain the bond’s tax-exempt status.

NATaT supports the efforts of the House Municipal Finance Caucus as a forum to discuss the opportunities and challenges for local governments to fund initiatives that strengthen our communities, and to advocate for bipartisan policies that enhance our access to the capital markets.

**Unfunded Mandates and Federal Preemption**

NATaT supports a common-sense review and re-write of the EPA’s pending “Waters of the U.S.” rule without unnecessarily expanding the jurisdiction of the Clean Water Act.

NATaT supports changes to the Department of Labor’s *Overtime Rule* that would increase the salary threshold criteria for exempt employees. However, the salary threshold criteria recommended in the last Administration would have severely impacted local government budgets across the country. NATaT would support a more modest increase.

NATaT opposes federal government involvement in issues that should be resolved at the local level by elected public officials who are closest to the people affected. The federal government should limit its involvement in issues such as personnel matters, land use decisions, economic development, and delivery
of local government services, and give local elected officials maximum flexibility in selecting the best options to achieve local priorities.

- As mentioned in the “Broadband” section of the platform, NATaT supports preserving long-standing local zoning authorities in the deployment of emerging technologies, like small cell 5G. That authority is essential to protecting the safety of our residents.

**Federal Funding**

- Census population counts have major implications for how a large portion of federal dollars are distributed to states and local governments, as well as for congressional redistricting. In addition to securing sufficient federal funding to ensure an accurate 2020 Census, NATaT supports efforts to improve response rates and ensure that accurate information is recorded. The US Census Bureau’s move to online reporting will negatively impact certain populations and areas that do not have access to broadband. Therefore, counts may not be accurate.

- NATaT supports efforts to control federal spending but supports increased, or at least level funding for those federal programs that promote local economic development, create jobs, and generate tax revenues to all levels of government. They include: USDA’s Rural Development programs; FEMA’s State and Local Programs, particularly Fire Act Grants; and Economic Development Administration programs.

- NATaT supports budget allocation policies that are fair to towns and townships. A disproportionate amount of federal program dollars are directed to larger metropolitan communities, such as federal transportation and community development funds. While those communities have significant needs, so do our nation’s smaller communities. Allowing smaller local governments to access funding directly, and in the same manner as large municipalities, will enhance job creation and economic development in communities throughout the country.
The National Association of Towns and Townships (NATaT) is the voice for more than 10,000 towns and townships across the country seeking to enhance the ability of smaller communities to deliver public services, economic vitality, and good government to their citizens. America’s towns and townships seek to partner with the federal government to ensure that public laws, policies, regulations, and resources support our role in fostering local democracy.

There are approximately 39,000 units of local government in the United States. Of that number, 85 percent serve communities with less than 10,000 people and nearly half have fewer than 1,000 residents. Approximately one quarter of all Americans live in rural areas, roughly the same percentage as live in central cities. NATaT was formed more than 40 years ago to provide those smaller communities a strong voice in Washington, D.C. NATaT’s purpose today, as it was then, is to champion pro-town and -township federal initiatives and to promote legislative and regulatory policies designed to strengthen smaller units of local government.

NATaT has developed a proactive federal agenda to ensure that the needs and interests of the nation’s smaller communities are reflected in all major federal statutory, regulatory, funding, and policy decisions made in Washington. NATaT is eager to work in collaboration with the other local government associations, the Administration, and Congress to achieve these goals.

NATaT members include town and township officials represented by the following state associations:

- Township Officials of Illinois
- Michigan Townships Association
- Minnesota Association of Townships
- Association of Towns of the State of New York
- North Dakota Township Officers Association
- Ohio Township Association
- Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors
- Wisconsin Towns Association

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