WASHINGTON, DC (August 4, 2016) – The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) recently issued awards through two competitive grant programs: the Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery, or TIGER, and the inaugural round of the Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Project program, referred to by USDOT as the FASTLANE program. In both programs, awards to fund nationally significant freight infrastructure fell short of expectations.

Following years of advocacy by the Coalition for America’s Gateways and Trade Corridors (CAGTC) for a freight-specific competitive grant program, the FASTLANE program was designed by Congress to make investments in the nation’s most critical freight and highway needs. Investment criteria written into law, and reflected in USDOT’s grant solicitation, focused on goods movement infrastructure and listed goals such as increasing global economic competitiveness; improving connectivity between freight modes; and improving the safety, efficiency and reliability of the movement of freight and people.

In early July, USDOT released its proposed list of 18 FASTLANE project awards, followed by the eighth round of TIGER funding last week. Despite criteria advantaging economic benefits, many of our nation’s critical freight hubs did not receive funding in either competition. As a top U.S. international trade gateway, Southern California’s San Pedro Bay area handles 40 percent of our nation’s container traffic; Chicago’s CREATE program is recognized as a project of national significance for its impact on commerce as the principal U.S. freight intersection; Memphis, a global freight hub employing a higher percentage of logistics workers than any other region in the country; New Jersey has the highest density of railroads in the nation and high volumes of international trade; and Florida’s seaports provide a critical trade link to growing economies in the Southern Hemisphere – these economic engines went unrecognized. People-moving projects fared well in FASTLANE, while freight infrastructure had its poorest showing ever in TIGER with only 26 percent of funds going to freight projects, down from a high of 53% in 2010.

“Competitive grant programs are designed to award only the best projects satisfying program intention and criteria. Like the early rounds of the TIGER competitive grant program, the FASTLANE award process will need fine tuning going forward to ensure all awards meet the program’s high standards,” said CAGTC Chairman Tim Lovain, Executive Vice President of Capitol Strategies Partners. “We look forward to reviewing the full list of applications under the first round of FASTLANE and working with USDOT to ensure that in the future, funding is more focused on significant freight awards, as Congress intended. There are vast freight needs across the country and this type of infrastructure investment yields the highest return.”
Now in its eighth funding round, the TIGER competitive grant program is appropriated annually by Congress with the intent of generating economic recovery through infrastructure investments. Despite the program's broad eligibility, goods movement infrastructure historically competes well in the TIGER discretionary grant program because of its weight as an economic multiplier. While investments benefiting goods movement have earned as high as 53 percent of total funding in previous rounds of TIGER, USDOT awarded just 26 percent of total funding to only 11 projects out of 40 winners – an all-time low. Successful freight projects under TIGER VIII included Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Rosecrans/ Marquardt grade separation project, which will separate a busy freight railroad mainline track from motor vehicle traffic; and the Port of Portland's Marine Terminal Freight and Jobs Access Project, which will build a grade separation over a busy marine terminal rail lead and increase connectivity between the port and the National Highway System. Attached is a chart showing the declining share of freight investment over the eight rounds of TIGER.

“Recognition that freight requires significantly-increased investment continues to gain traction in Congress, as evidenced by the landmark freight investment directives under the FAST Act,” said CAGTC President Leslie Blakey. “Yet the competitive grant tools designed to guide these investments require fine tuning to ensure limited resources provide the highest return by investing in goods movement. Absent transparency from USDOT it is difficult to reconcile and understand how decisions were made, but we look forward to continuing our dialogue with USDOT and hope that future rounds of both the TIGER program and the FASTLANE program invest in the nation’s most critical freight assets.”

Using USDOT’s freight volumes map, CAGTC charted USDOT’s FASTLANE award selections as well as CAGTC member applications that did not receive funding under the first round of FASTLANE. Please see the attached maps to view information such as freight volumes, export and import gateways, and to learn where further investment is needed. This information is also available on our website.

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About the Coalition
The Coalition for America's Gateways and Trade Corridors (CAGTC) is a diverse coalition of more than 60 public and private organizations dedicated to increasing federal investment in America’s intermodal freight infrastructure. In contrast to single mode interests, CAGTC’s main mission is to promote a seamless goods movement transportation system across all modes to enhance capacity and economic growth. For more information on the Coalition for America’s Gateways and Trade Corridors, please visit www.tradecorridors.org