



2010 Federal Platform





The National Association of Towns and Townships (NATaT) is the voice of more than 13,000 towns and townships across America 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 progress.

Ensure Federal Resources Reach Towns and Townships

MAKE ALLOCATION POLICIES FAIR TO TOWNS AND TOWNSHIPS

Smaller communities in this country do not receive the federal assistance afforded to larger metropolitan areas. For example, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided significant federal resources to create jobs and improve infrastructure within large metropolitan areas and state governments, but towns and townships were largely neglected. NATaT supports legislation that utilizes the same process for both large and small local governments to receive funds. By allowing smaller local governments to access funding directly – and in the same manner as large municipalities – jobs will be created in economically distressed communities throughout the country. For example, proposed legislation called the Local Jobs for America Act (H.R. 4812) would provide \$75 billion to local governments to hire or retain employees. While large “entitlement” communities of 50,000 or more population would receive funding directly from the federal government, smaller governments would need to apply for assistance through their states. These smaller local governments would be required to devote scarce staff time to put together applications to bring the federal funding through state bureaucratic processes. This approach to distributing federal funds, through state bureaucracies and governor’s offices, was proved to be inefficient and unsuccessful in ARRA.

NATaT supports legislation that would provide direct payments to units of local governments to support priority community needs. For example, the Local Fiscal Assistance Act of 2009 (H.R. 3007) would establish a “Local Fiscal Assistance Trust Fund” and make direct payments to localities. It would provide towns and townships with a direct, flexible source of federal assistance to provide essential services, preserve and create jobs, and improve infrastructure in their communities. H.R. 3007 is modeled after the successful General Revenue Sharing program established in the early 1970s that ended in the 1980s. This legislation would provide three years of funding to help localities – both large and small – revive their economics and renew their roles in job creation. Likewise, other federal block grant funding programs should be structured to ensure that small and rural communities can access and use these resources.



Recognize the Transportation Needs of Towns and Townships in the Reauthorization of Our Nation's Surface Transportation Law

1. INCREASED FEDERAL SUPPORT FOR RURAL ROADS

While one-fifth of America's population resides in rural areas, three-fifths of all traffic fatalities and serious injuries occur on rural roads. NATaT supports increased funding in the rural road safety program under SAFETEA-LU Section 148(f)(1), by providing \$2 billion annually over the 5-year statutory period, including \$500 million for small and rural communities to implement sign reflectivity upgrades. NATaT also recommends that the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) deadlines for sign reflectivity replacements be tied to the availability of federal, state, and local match funding for this mandate, allowing extensions of the current 2014 mandate if localities are not able to obtain sufficient funding for new sign deployment. Finally, NATaT supports a reauthorization of SAFETEA-LU that makes smaller, locally-owned rural roads and bridges eligible for federal highway repair funds.



2. ANY MOVE TO PRICING ROAD USE WITH VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED MUST TAKE RURAL COMMUNITIES INTO ACCOUNT

A move by the federal government to fund the national transportation system through "vehicle miles traveled" (VMT) pricing could seriously harm citizens who must access work and services across longer driving distances. Any move to VMT-based pricing strategies for transportation funding must account for the needs of rural citizens and small businesses to use their vehicles to access work and daily services.

Limit Federal Overreach into Local and State Affairs

1. TOWNS AND TOWNSHIPS OPPOSE FEDERAL LEGISLATION TO REGULATE LOCAL CEMETERIES

Towns and townships across America responsibly manage cemeteries for the public good. Cemetery management is not a money-making operation for local governments, and oftentimes their maintenance have fallen onto towns and townships after cemeteries have either gone bankrupt or been abandoned. NATaT opposes the Bereaved Consumer's Bill of Rights (H.R. 3655), which would require the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to enact new regulations for all cemeteries, including state and local cemeteries. Minor violations of new FTC cemetery rules could trigger fines at the rate of \$16,000 per violation. The FTC's jurisdiction is generally limited to for-profit businesses, and should not be expanded to include state and local governments. Furthermore, state legislation already exists to regulate local cemeteries.

2. COLLECTIVE BARGAINING RIGHTS BEST DETERMINED BY STATES

Congress is considering legislation that would require local governments to grant public safety employees, including police, firefighters, and emergency medical workers, the right to collectively bargain over hours and wages. NATaT opposes the “one-size-fits-all” solution provided in the Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act (H.R. 413/S. 1611/S. 3194), and believes that states and local governments are in the best position to determine the nature and extent of collective bargaining rights for public safety employees. This legislation would impact localities in states that do not grant collective bargaining rights statewide for public safety workers or that prohibit such bargaining, as well as localities in all other states that would become subject to National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) oversight and new litigation threats.



Support Volunteer First Responders

PROVIDE SMALL TAX BENEFITS TO VOLUNTEER FIRST RESPONDERS

NATaT supports the Volunteer Responder Incentive Protection Reauthorization Act (H.R. 3666/S. 3136), which provides tax benefits to volunteer first responders. The Act, set to expire in 2010, exempts from federal income and FICA taxes any property tax benefits provided to volunteer fire and emergency medical service personnel by state and local governments. It also exempts the first \$360 per year of any other type of benefit or payment received by those volunteers. H.R. 3666/S. 3136 would extend the tax exemption through 2013 and expand it to cover up to \$600 per year in benefits. Volunteer firefighters alone save local communities of all sizes nearly \$37 billion a year. Providing financial incentives, like tax benefits, to volunteer first responders is one way to help recruit and retain these essential volunteers.



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