Top 5 in 2017: Transportation and Infrastructure

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CSG Director of Transportation and Infrastructure Policy Sean Slone outlines the top five issues in transportation policy for 2017, including federal infrastructure investment plans, state solutions for infrastructure funding, autonomous vehicles, transit-oriented community development, project selection and prioritization.

New President, New Congress, New Plan for Infrastructure Investment?
During his campaign, President Donald Trump called for a $1 trillion package to invest in the nation’s infrastructure that he and his advisers said could be made possible in part with tax credits to unlock private investment. But Republicans and Democrats in Congress and elsewhere could have significantly different ideas when it comes to the plan and deciding what to fund. Beyond any one-time infrastructure investment in 2017 though, will Congress be able to hit the ground running so they can be ready when it comes time to reauthorize the FAST Act surface transportation authorization bill and again rescue the Highway Trust Fund from insolvency in 2020?

States Seek Their Own Paths on Funding Infrastructure
State transportation funding efforts could be back in the spotlight in 2017. The list of those that could tackle transportation revenues includes as many as 16 states. Some had a task force or special commission in place in 2016 to come up with funding ideas. Others have long targeted 2017 as the year for action or are completing unfinished business from past years. Plenty of old ideas (gas taxes, registration fees, tolls) are likely to be considered, but mileage-based user fees and other innovations are likely to get a look as well.

The Future is Now
After years of saying they were still decades away, autonomous vehicles and other technologies are here... or nearly here. Uber has a fleet of autonomous vehicles in Pittsburgh. Uber’s self-driving truck company, Otto, recently delivered a truck full of beer in Colorado. So now the question becomes, “How will state governments respond and how will they need to respond?” The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration issued proposed guidelines last summer for states to consider in drafting
autonomous vehicle legislation. But in trying to encourage the development of these technologies and perhaps reap an economic windfall, states will need to guard against doing more harm than good through legislation and regulation. Both the auto industry and NHTSA have warned of a patchwork of laws across the country that could hinder interstate travel and interstate commerce.

**Transportation Reshaping Communities**

The 2016 election saw the passage of ballot measures to enable new transit investments in Atlanta, Indianapolis, Los Angeles and Seattle. But in Washington, D.C., and other cities, years of neglect of transit systems are burdening public officials with funding, safety and service challenges. Meanwhile, ride-hailing services are continuing to evolve to fill increasingly essential roles. As governments look to provide and enable all these mobility options, how do they ensure that successful communities are built around transit, that housing remains affordable and that those communities work for all their residents?

**Rethinking Transportation Project Selection & Prioritization**

States are seeking to change how transportation projects are selected by enacting a variety of changes. Some are making efforts to remove politics from project selection, determine which projects could have the best return on investment, factor in long-term costs, right-size projects to reap savings and reconsider some long-planned projects that may no longer make sense given population shifts, emerging technologies and changing transportation mode preferences. Increasingly faced with limited resources, states likely will need to consider these factors as they make project selections in the future. What are states’ freight infrastructure needs going forward and how will they change in the face of automated truck platoons, carrier drones and the Panama Canal expansion? What are the transportation challenges for rural areas, particularly when it comes to serving seniors and individuals with disabilities? How does transportation planning need to change at the state, regional and local levels to reflect the rapid rate of changes in technology and other areas the nation is likely to see in the years ahead?

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