



National Bureau of Economic Research

Call for Proposals Economics of Transportation in the 21st Century

To promote research in transportation economics and to strengthen the economic basis for designing transportation policy in the 21st century, the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), with the generous support of the US Department of Transportation (DOT), is carrying out a multi-year research initiative on “Transportation Economics in the 21st Century.” This initiative, led by NBER researchers Edward Glaeser of Harvard University, James Poterba of MIT, and Stephen Redding of Princeton University, is now in its fifth year. It is designed to bring together researchers in various subfields of economics to study key issues in the transportation sector and to develop an agenda for future research. During the last four years, this initiative supported twenty-five projects, which are listed here:

<https://www.nber.org/programs-projects/projects-and-centers/transportation-economics-21st-century/transportation-economics-21st-century-research-projects>

This year, subject to funding approval, the initiative hopes to support five new projects on the economics of the US transportation sector. Priority research topics include, but are not limited to:

- The effects of the transportation sector on greenhouse gas emissions and on the environment more broadly, the impact of tax and regulatory policies on transportation-related pollution, and the cost of reducing carbon emissions from the transportation sector.
- Alternative approaches to measuring the costs and benefits of federal transportation policies and investments, with particular attention to the distribution of costs and benefits and the impact of transportation policies on disadvantaged communities.
- The impact of new technologies, such as in-vehicle tests for sobriety, inter-vehicle communication and monitoring tools, and new vehicle design features, as well as other policy innovations, on transportation safety.
- The impact of federal transportation spending on output, employment, private R&D spending, and innovation. Research assessing the impacts of current and past policies are particularly welcome.
- The economics of light-duty vehicle demand, including the determinants of the demand for electric vehicles, the cost, availability, and performance of public and private vehicle charging infrastructure, and the effects of the long-term trends such as rising remote work on the demand for transportation services.
- The links between differences in access to transportation services and disparities in economic outcomes, such as employment, income wealth, health status, education, and homeownership, across income, geographic, ethnic, gender, racial, and other socio-demographic groups.
- The consequences of new technologies for managing multi-modal freight transportation, including those involving statistical tools such as machine learning applied to large data sets.
- The impact of the transportation sector on aggregate economic activity, labor market conditions, the competitiveness of the US manufacturing sector, the distribution of economic activity within urban areas and between rural and urban areas, and the costs of wholesale and retail trade.

Researchers interested in studying these topics should submit a proposal of no more than five pages, single spaced, including references, tables, graphs, and other supplementary material, in PDF format by **11:59pm ET on Wednesday, April 3, 2024**.

Each proposal should describe the research question to be studied, the data and methods to be used, and the composition of the research team that will carry out the project. Preliminary findings are welcome. The proposal must include a conflict of interest statement describing any financial or other interests of the research team that might bear on the proposed work, especially any financial or other ties to the transportation industry. Each proposal should include a one-paragraph summary statement explaining how the potential findings could help to inform research or policy issues of interest to DOT.

To be eligible for consideration, a project must have at least one investigator who is a faculty member at a U.S. college or university. Research support is only available for faculty members and graduate students at these institutions. All investigators and co-investigators must hold Ph.Ds. Doctoral students may draw support from a project and collaborate on the resulting research paper, but they may not serve as investigators.

Proposals for both theoretical and empirical projects, from scholars who are early in their careers, with and without NBER affiliations, and from researchers from under-represented groups are especially welcome. Proposals may be submitted by following this link:

<https://conference.nber.org/confsubmit/backend/cfp?id=ETf24p>

The organizers will review the proposals and, in consultation with the research staff at DOT, select projects for support. Researchers who submit proposals that are selected for funding will be notified by early May; project start dates are contingent on funding availability. The research team for each project will receive \$38,000 of salary support for investigator(s) who are faculty members at U.S. colleges or universities, \$10,000 in research assistant support, and \$3,000 for other research costs such as conference travel and data purchase. Investigators and research assistants must be eligible to be paid as NBER employees; the NBER will not make sub-awards.

In addition to providing research funding, the initiative will also facilitate access to a number of data sets that are collected and maintained by DOT. A partial index of such data sets may be found on the Bureau of Transportation Statistics website: <https://www.bts.gov/>; additional links to transportation data sets may be found at: <https://www.nber.org/research/data/transportation-economics-21st-century-data-resources>

Research teams will be expected to launch their research during the summer of 2024, and to participate in a research conference in October 2024. Questions related to research proposals or other aspects of this research initiative should be directed to Alison Oaxaca at aoaxaca@nber.org.