



441 G St. N.W.  
Washington, DC 20548

June 24, 2016

The Honorable James Inhofe  
Chair  
The Honorable Barbara Boxer  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Environment and Public Works  
United States Senate

The Honorable Bill Shuster  
Chair  
The Honorable Peter A. DeFazio  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
House of Representatives

### **Highway Trust Fund: Administrative Expenses of the Federal Highway Administration**

Section 1433 of Public Law 114-94, Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act), included a provision for GAO to submit a report describing the administrative expenses of the Department of Transportation's (DOT) Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) funded from the Highway Trust Fund (HTF). Our objectives were to describe (1) the types and amounts of administrative expenses funded from HTF for FHWA programs and offices during the 3 most recent fiscal years (fiscal years 2013 through 2015); (2) the extent to which FHWA effectively designed tracking and monitoring internal controls over its administrative expenses as of September 30, 2015; and (3) the extent to which FHWA has the flexibility, under existing laws and regulations, to reallocate administrative monies funded from HTF between general operating expenses and other functions.

We briefed the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and its Subcommittee on Highways and Transit on April 27, 2016, and the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works on May 2, 2016, on the results of our work. This report formally transmits the briefing slides as of May 11, 2016, with the final results of our work in response to the provision in Section 1433 of the FAST Act (see enc. I).

To address our first objective, we reviewed relevant legislation, FHWA budget documents, and general ledger data to describe and present the types and amounts of administrative expenses of FHWA funded from HTF during the 3 most recent fiscal years (fiscal years 2013 through 2015).

To address our second objective, we (1) obtained and reviewed applicable policies and procedures used by FHWA; DOT's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-123, *Management's Responsibility for Internal Control* Summary Report; relevant internal control risk assessments; and OMB Circular A-123 process documents to identify FHWA's tracking and monitoring internal controls over its administrative expenses; and (2) determined whether

FHWA effectively designed tracking and monitoring internal controls over its administrative expenses as of September 30, 2015, in accordance with *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*.<sup>1</sup> We focused our review on the tracking and monitoring controls as they relate to general operating expenses because these expenses represented over 90 percent of administrative monies funded from HTF for fiscal year 2015.

To address our third objective, we reviewed existing laws and regulations and relevant budgetary guidance to describe the extent to which FHWA has the flexibility to reallocate administrative monies funded from HTF between general operating expenses and other functions. We assessed the reliability of the data we used by reviewing relevant documentation and interviewing knowledgeable FHWA officials. We found the data to be reliable for the purposes cited in this report.

We conducted this performance audit from January 2016 to May 2016 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

In summary, we found that FHWA functions funded by administrative monies from HTF include (1) general operating expenses (salaries and benefits, equipment, travel, and other expenses);<sup>2</sup> (2) transfers to the Appalachian Regional Commission; and (3) specific programs consisting of the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise, Highway Use Tax Evasion, On-the-Job Training Support Services, Consolidation of Programs (Operation Lifesaver, Public Road Safety Clearinghouse, Work Zone Safety Grants, and National Work Zone Safety Information Clearinghouse), and Air Quality and Congestion Mitigation Measure Outcomes Assessment Study. In our review of tracking and monitoring internal controls over general operating expenses, we found that FHWA had effectively designed these controls as of September 30, 2015, for the significant business processes related to general operating expenses. Furthermore, we found that FHWA has limited flexibility, under existing laws and regulations, to reallocate administrative monies funded from HTF between general operating expenses and certain other functions.

We are not making any recommendations in this report.

### **Agency Comments**

We provided a draft of this report to DOT for review and comment. In its response to our report, DOT indicated that FHWA will continue to implement tracking and monitoring internal controls to effectively manage its funding for general operating expenses provided to the agency under the FAST Act. DOT's written comments are reprinted in enclosure II. Further, DOT provided technical comments that were incorporated, as appropriate.

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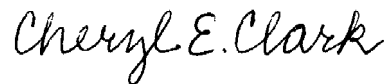
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<sup>1</sup>See GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#) (Washington, D.C.: November 1999).

<sup>2</sup>Other expenses consisted of utilities, supplies, rent, printing, transportation, and other services, including reimbursement to DOT's Office of Inspector General for conducting annual financial statements audits.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees and the Assistant Secretary for Administration at the Department of Transportation. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have questions concerning this report, please contact me at (202) 512-9377 or [clarkce@gao.gov](mailto:clarkce@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report include Lynda Downing (Assistant Director), Steven Cohen (Assistant Director), Patrick Frey, Diana Lee, Vivian Ly, Erika Szatmari, and Estelle Tsay-Huang.



Cheryl E. Clark  
Director  
Financial Management and Assurance

Enclosures

**Enclosure I: Briefing for Congressional Committees**

See next page for presentation.

# **Highway Trust Fund: Administrative Expenses of the Federal Highway Administration**

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**Information Presented to the  
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works  
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**

## Background

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- Section 1433 of Public Law 114-94, Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act), included a provision for GAO to submit a report describing the administrative expenses of the Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) funded from the Highway Trust Fund (HTF).

## Objectives

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- Our objectives were to describe the following:
  1. The types and amounts of administrative expenses funded from HTF for FHWA programs and offices during the 3 most recent fiscal years (fiscal years 2013 through 2015).
  2. The extent to which FHWA effectively designed tracking and monitoring internal controls over its administrative expenses as of September 30, 2015.
  3. The extent to which FHWA has the flexibility, under existing laws and regulations, to reallocate administrative monies funded from HTF between general operating expenses and other functions.

# Scope and Methodology

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- To address our first objective, we took the following action:
  - Reviewed relevant legislation, FHWA budget documents, and general ledger data to describe and present the types and amounts of administrative expenses of FHWA funded from HTF during the 3 most recent fiscal years (fiscal years 2013 through 2015).
- To address our second objective, we took the following actions:
  - Obtained and reviewed applicable policies and procedures used by FHWA; the Department of Transportation's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-123, *Management's Responsibility for Internal Control* Summary Report; relevant internal control risk assessments; and OMB Circular A-123 process documents to identify FHWA's tracking and monitoring internal controls over its administrative expenses.
  - Determined whether FHWA effectively designed tracking and monitoring internal controls over its administrative expenses as of September 30, 2015, in accordance with *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*.<sup>1</sup> We focused our review on the tracking and monitoring controls as they relate to general operating expenses because these expenses represented over 90 percent of administrative monies funded from HTF for fiscal year 2015.

<sup>1</sup>See GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1 (Washington, D.C.: November 1999).



## Scope and Methodology (continued)

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- To address our third objective, we took the following action:
  - Reviewed existing laws and regulations and relevant budgetary guidance to describe the extent to which FHWA has the flexibility to reallocate administrative monies funded from HTF between general operating expenses and other functions.
- We assessed the reliability of the data we used by reviewing relevant documentation and interviewing knowledgeable FHWA officials. We found the data to be reliable for the purposes cited in this briefing.

## Scope and Methodology (continued)

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- We conducted this performance audit from January 2016 to May 2016 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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# FHWA Functions Funded by Administrative Monies from HTF

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- 23 U.S. Code § 104(a) provided monies for administrative expenses of FHWA to be used to
  - administer the provisions of law to be funded from appropriations for the Federal-aid and other highways programs;
  - make transfers to the Appalachian Regional Commission; and
  - reimburse, as appropriate, the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Transportation for conducting annual audits of financial statements.
- Other statutes authorize the Secretary of Transportation to deduct sums as necessary from administrative monies made available under § 104(a) to carry out specific programs.
- Funds authorized for each fiscal year remain available until expended.

# FHWA Functions Funded by Administrative Monies from HTF (continued)

<b>General Operating Expenses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salaries and Benefits</li> <li>• Equipment</li> <li>• Travel</li> <li>• Other<sup>a</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Transfers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appalachian Regional Commission</li> </ul>
<b>Programs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disadvantaged Business Enterprise</li> <li>• Highway Use Tax Evasion</li> <li>• On-the-Job Training Support Services</li> <li>• Consolidation of Programs: Operation Lifesaver, Public Road Safety Clearinghouse, Work Zone Safety Grants, and National Work Zone Safety Information Clearinghouse</li> <li>• Air Quality and Congestion Mitigation Study<sup>b</sup> (funding authorized from funds made available for fiscal year 2013)</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup>Other expenses consisted of utilities, supplies, rent, printing, transportation, and other services, including reimbursement to the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Transportation for conducting annual financial statements audits.

<sup>b</sup>The full title of this program is Air Quality and Congestion Mitigation Measure Outcomes Assessment Study.

# FHWA Obligations Funded by Administrative Monies from HTF for Fiscal Years 2013 through 2015

<i>(in Millions)</i>	Fiscal Years		
	2013	2014	2015
<b>Obligations</b>			
General Operating Expenses			
Salaries and Benefits	\$301.2	\$309.1	\$301.8
Other <sup>a</sup>	\$103.3	\$94.3	\$95.4
Travel	\$9.0	\$8.7	\$6.7
Equipment	\$1.6	\$3.2	\$6.7
Total General Operating Expenses	\$415.1	\$415.3	\$410.6
Appalachian Regional Commission	\$2.9	\$2.7	\$2.8
<b>Programs</b>			
Disadvantaged Business Enterprise	\$10.3	\$10.9	\$9.3
Highway Use Tax Evasion	\$2.2	\$6.1	\$6.6
On-the-Job Training Support Services	\$8.0	\$9.2	\$8.8
Consolidation of Programs	\$1.2	\$2.9	\$1.9
Air Quality and Congestion Mitigation Study <sup>b</sup>	\$0.0	\$1.0	\$0.0
Total Programs	\$21.7	\$30.1	\$26.6
<b>Total Obligations</b>	<b>\$439.7</b>	<b>\$448.1</b>	<b>\$440.0</b>

Source: GAO analysis of Federal Highway Administration data.

<sup>a</sup>Other expenses consisted of utilities, supplies, rent, printing, transportation, and other services, including reimbursement to the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Transportation for conducting annual financial statements audits.

<sup>b</sup>Funding was authorized from funds made available for fiscal year 2013. Funds authorized for fiscal year 2013 were to remain available until expended. Funds were obligated for the study in fiscal year 2014 from fiscal year 2013 funding.

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# Design of Internal Controls to Track and Monitor General Operating Expenses

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- Internal control is an integral component of an organization's management that provides reasonable assurance that the following objectives are being achieved:
  - effectiveness and efficiency of operations,
  - reliability of financial reporting, and
  - compliance with applicable laws and regulations.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1.

## Design of Internal Controls to Track and Monitor General Operating Expenses (continued)

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- We found that FHWA had effectively designed tracking and monitoring internal controls over its general operating expenses as of September 30, 2015, for the significant business processes related to general operating expenses:
  - Human Resources/Time and Attendance;
  - Procure to Pay;
  - Travel Management; and
  - Property, Plant and Equipment.

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## Design of Internal Controls to Track and Monitor General Operating Expenses (continued)

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- Examples of key internal controls for tracking and monitoring FHWA administrative expenses:
  - Human Resources/Time and Attendance:
    - Time and Attendance approving officials review and approve time and attendance in the Consolidated Automated System for Time and Labor Entry.
    - Human Resources specialists review and process authorized employee promotions in a timely manner.
  - Procure to Pay: Contracting Officer's Representatives/ Contracting Officers perform contract reviews, which include desk audits, formal audits where required, and final negotiations with contractors prior to payment.



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## Design of Internal Controls to Track and Monitor General Operating Expenses (continued)

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- **Travel Management:** Designated employees and approving officials review and approve travel authorizations for accuracy and reasonableness.
- **Property, Plant and Equipment:** The Office of Information Technology (IT) Services (for IT assets) or the Office of Management Services (for non-IT assets) assesses the justification for purchases of long-lived assets prior to processing the procurement requests.

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# Limited Flexibility to Reallocate Administrative Monies Funded from HTF

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- FHWA has limited flexibility, under existing laws and regulations, to reallocate administrative monies funded from HTF between general operating expenses and certain other functions. These other functions funded by administrative monies from HTF include transfers to the Appalachian Regional Commission and specific programs.
- Limitations include the following:
  - General operating expenses and transfers to the Appalachian Regional Commission are subject to obligation limitations specified in annual appropriations acts.
  - Specific programs are subject to maximum and minimum funding provided by their authorizing statutes.
  - Funding cannot be used for any purpose not authorized by statute.

# Limited Flexibility to Reallocate Administrative Monies Funded from HTF (continued)

<i>(in Millions)</i>	Fiscal Years		
	2013	2014	2015
<b>Funding Authorization<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>\$454.2</b>	<b>\$440.0</b>	<b>\$440.0</b>
<b>Obligation Limitation</b>			
General Operating Expenses	\$416.1	\$416.1	\$426.1
Appalachian Regional Commission	\$3.2	\$3.2	\$3.2
<b>Total Obligation Limitation<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>\$419.3</b>	<b>\$419.3</b>	<b>\$429.3</b>

### Maximum or Minimum Program Funding Limitation

Disadvantaged Business Enterprise	The Secretary shall make available funding for this program that is not more than \$10 million. <sup>c</sup>
Highway Use Tax Evasion	The Secretary shall make available funding for this program that is not more than \$10 million. <sup>c</sup>
On-the-Job Training Support Services	The Secretary shall make available funding for this program that is not more than \$10 million. <sup>c</sup>
Consolidation of Programs	The Secretary shall make available funding for this program that is not less than \$3 million. <sup>c</sup>
Air Quality and Congestion Mitigation Study	Of the amounts made available for fiscal year 2013, the Secretary shall make available funding for this program study that is not more than \$1 million. <sup>c</sup>

Source: GAO analysis of public laws and Federal Highway Administration budget documents.

<sup>a</sup>Funding authorization specified in authorization acts.

<sup>b</sup>Obligation limitations specified in annual appropriations acts.

<sup>c</sup>P.L. 112-141; P.L. 114-41.

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## Limited Flexibility to Reallocate Administrative Monies Funded from HTF (continued)

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- For fiscal year 2015, Congress authorized \$440.0 million of administrative monies for FHWA to be funded from HTF. FHWA's annual appropriations for fiscal year 2015 gave FHWA the flexibility to obligate up to a total of \$429.3 million for general operating expenses and transfers to the Appalachian Regional Commission. If FHWA obligated the entire \$429.3 million for these two functions, it would have \$10.7 million available for specific programs (subject to funding limitations set out in authorizing statutes).
- Based on the specific program needs, budget decisions, and any minimum funding requirements (e.g., for the Consolidation of Programs), FHWA determines how much to allocate to each of the three functions (general operating expenses, transfers, and specific programs) from the available monies in a given fiscal year.

## Enclosure II: Comments from the Department of Transportation



**U.S. Department of  
Transportation**

Office of the Secretary  
of Transportation

Assistant Secretary  
for Administration

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

JUN 8 2016

Ms. Cheryl E. Clark,  
Director, Financial Management and Assurance  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW.  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Clark:

We appreciate the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) finding that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) effectively designed tracking and monitoring internal controls for significant business processes related to general operating expenses (GOE). The FHWA closely monitors, manages and controls its administrative expenses funding to ensure that the agency can efficiently and effectively oversee the Federal-aid program while protecting the funds that are entrusted to us by the public. The Agency's strong internal controls allowed it to continue to carry out mission essential operations despite a significant reduction to its Fiscal Years 2013 – 2015 GOE funding under the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act (MAP-21). The Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act provided FHWA with additional GOE funding and the Agency continues to implement tracking and monitoring internal controls to effectively manage these limited resources to include the following:

- Annual assessments of business procedures;
- Issuance of annual A-123 financial summary reports.
- Continued review and updates of Standard Operating Procedures
- Executive Director approval of office budget requests;
- Adherence to agency travel caps; and
- Continued vigilance and rigorous approval process on conferences;

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the GAO draft report. Please contact Madeline M. Chulumovich, Director, Audit Relations and Program Improvement, at (202) 366-6512 with any question or if you would like to obtain additional details.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Marootian".

Jeff Marootian  
Assistant Secretary for Administration

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