FHWA Special Briefing
The Potential Impacts of Climate Change on Transportation: Climate Change Adaptation

Over the past few years, Governors, State Legislatures and their State DOTs have increasingly focused on climate change issues – in terms of the contribution from the transportation sector and mitigation strategies as well as the impacts on transportation infrastructure from increases in weather-related events and climate extremes.

The Transportation Research Board recently released Special Report 290: The Potential Impacts of Climate Change on U.S. Transportation which discussed the impacts on transportation: “…increases in very hot days and heat waves, increases in Arctic temperatures, rising sea levels coupled with storm surges and land subsidence, more frequent intense precipitation events, and increases in the intensity of strong hurricanes. The impacts will vary by mode of transportation and region of the country, but they will be widespread and costly in both human and economic terms and will require significant changes in the planning, design, construction, operation and maintenance of transportation systems.”

FHWA is also focusing considerable attention on the impacts of climate change on transportation. In August the FHWA Associate Administrators Gloria Shepherd and King Gee requested the FHWA Division Administrators survey the State DOTs on current or planned activities to understand and respond to potential climate change impacts. They specifically requested information regarding whether states have or plan to conduct inventories, as recommended in the TRB report, “of critical transportation infrastructure to identify whether, when and where projected climates changes in particular regions might be consequential,” or whether other activities are underway. They indicated potential examples of impacts might include increased frequency and intensity of flooding, more wildfires and erosion in the Western U.S., or coastal beach erosion in the southeast and Gulf States.

Gloria Shepherd and King Gee are scheduled to provide a special briefing for AASHTO’s SCOH and SCOP members to discuss the results of the survey, and to initiate a dialogue on next steps for the State DOTs and FHWA to collaboratively address such issues as critical infrastructure inventories, design and materials standards, and changes in long term investment strategies.