U.S. Department of Transportation

FY 2026 EVALUATION PLAN

Secretary of Transportation
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Executive Summary

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) adopts the *FY 2026 Evaluation Plan*, as required by 5 USC § 312(b). It describes four new significant evaluations that DOT will undertake in FY 2026. It also reports progress on 23 evaluations introduced in prior Annual Evaluation Plans. For each evaluation, the Plan describes what we will learn or have learned, and how the information will be or has been used to improve DOT's programs, policies, regulations, or operations. The *FY 2026 Evaluation Plan* adheres to the DOT Evaluation Framework's commitment to supporting "rigorous, relevant evaluations…that result in continuous improvement across the Department."[1]

DOT conducts numerous evaluations each year, but the *FY 2026 Evaluation Plan* only highlights a subset that are the most significant. DOT defines "significant" evaluations as including Administration priorities; examining programs that are large in their scale, scope, budget, or number of people or entities served; or analyzing programs that are critical to fulfilling DOT's mission. These evaluations will all produce preliminary, actionable findings that will be shared with Operating Administrations' leadership during FY 2026. The document reflects DOT's current thinking on the appropriate strategies to meet its evidence needs; however, these activities may change and are subject to availability of funds.

FY 2026's Four Evaluations Will Drive Better and Faster Outcomes

Evaluation	Lead	Evaluation Type	Description
Compliance, Safety, and Accountability (CSA) Program	FMCSA	Outcome	Evaluate the degree to which the CSA program contributes to reducing commercial motor vehicle (CMV) crashes, injuries, and fatalities by analyzing interventions and their results.
Airspace Modernization	FAA	Outcome	Review airspace modernization performance indicators, costs, and benefits, as well as industry's level of equipping aircraft with the appropriate electronic equipment.
Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) Discretionary Grant Program	FRA	Process	Evaluate the effectiveness of the RCE Program's outreach to communities with the highest-risk crossings, review the technical capacity of eligible applicants to develop applications in response to RCE Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs), and identify barriers to submitting applications.
Port Infrastructure Development Grant Program (PIDP)	MARAD	Process	Evaluate PIDP to understand how the program is being accessed by ports of different sizes and geographic areas, and the effect of PIDP's implementation processes on public entities' likelihood of submitting an application or receiving funding.

1 DOT (2025), *Evaluation Framework*, https://www.transportation.gov/mission/budget/evaluation-framework.

Compliance, Safety, and Accountability (CSA) Program

Operating Administration: Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA)

Summary: Evaluate the degree to which the CSA program contributes to reducing commercial motor vehicle (CMV) crashes, injuries, and fatalities by analyzing interventions and their results.

Program Overview and Context: The Compliance, Safety, and Accountability (CSA) Program is the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's (FMCSA) data-driven safety compliance and enforcement program.[2] It aims to prevent commercial motor vehicle-related crashes, injuries, and fatalities. Commercial motor vehicles are large trucks and buses. Fatalities involving commercial motor vehicles represent a disproportionately high share of roadway fatalities. CSA has three components. First, the Safety Measurement System (SMS) Component identifies and prioritizes the highest-risk carriers for investigation and assigns interventions that maximize limited resources. Second, the Intervention Component conducts more than 45,000 interventions annually, such as issuing warning letters or targeted roadside inspections. Warning letters notify motor carriers early about their safety performance and compliance problems and consequences if these do not improve, while targeted roadside inspections are prompted by data identifying a carrier's specific safety problems and are conducted at a permanent or temporary roadside inspection location. The Intervention Component also assesses why safety problems occur; recommends remedies; encourages corrective action; and invokes penalties for compliance failures.[3] Third, CSA's Determination Component issues Safety Fitness Determination (SFD) ratings to almost 763,000 motor carriers.[4]

Rationale for Conducting Evaluation: The evaluation will assess the degree to which CSA is an effective tool for improving roadway safety compliance and enforcement. The evaluation measures the Safety Measurement System Component's effectiveness at identifying carriers with safety problems to prioritize them for interventions, and the effectiveness of these interventions on safety outcomes.

CSA has not undergone a program evaluation to date because the program has been in a constant state of change since its inception. Additionally, there have been recent modifications to FMCSA's Safety Measurement System. By FY 2026, there will be enough data accrued since these changes took effect (at least two years of recent data plus historical data) to conduct a program evaluation.

Key Evaluation Questions

- What is CSA's impact on the number of crashes, severity of crashes, and/or fatalities involving large trucks and buses?
- To what extent is the CSA's Safety Measurement System effective at identifying the least safe companies?
- To what degree is the CSA's Intervention Component effective at removing unfit carriers from service?

2 CSA Program, https://csa.fmcsa.dot.gov/.
3 Interventions include early warnings to carriers (warning letters or targeted roadside inspection), investigations at a carrier's place of business or remotely, and follow on (cooperative safety plans, notice of claims or violation, or operation out of service orders). For more information visit https://csa.fmcsa.dot.gov/About/Intervene.
4 FMCSA, *Motor Carrier Analysis and Information Online, Analysis & Information Online*, https://ai.fmcsa.dot.gov/RegistrationStatistics/CustomReports.

Dissemination Strategy: Evaluation results will be briefed to FMCSA leadership team and then disseminated to agency staff as needed. In addition, the final report and underlying data will be published on FMCSA's website and shared with external stakeholders.

Planned Use of Results: FMCSA will be able to apply findings it develops from this evaluation to advance the Department's core mission of safety and efficiency and implement Executive Order 14286 *Enforcing Commonsense Rules of the Road for America's Truck Drivers*.[5] Using the evaluation's findings, FMCSA's Office of Safety will develop an action plan to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its safety compliance and enforcement operations. CSA program managers will use the findings to identify areas where they can make operational changes to achieve better and faster safety outcomes. FMCSA leaders will use the findings to target enforcement resources on the most effective interventions against the riskiest motor carriers.

Evaluation Type, Design, Data Collection Method, and Data Availability: The evaluation team will conduct a baseline analysis to include mapping out key CSA processes and reviewing literature, regulations, audits, field tests, and training resources.

Quantitative data from the FMCSA Motor Carrier Management Information System (MCMIS) data system will be analyzed to verify the appropriateness of the Safety Measurement System Component's prioritization process. The analysis will include a review of safety records (e.g., roadside inspections, violations, crash reports, and investigation results) and carrier violation data to compare performance before and after interventions. This analysis will examine the efficacy of interventions and measure correlations between the Safety Measurement System's prioritization system and carrier violations. Violation data from FY 2016 through 2024 will be analyzed to determine whether there is a correlation between poor Safety Measurement System scores; specific violations or groups of violations; and the probability of crashes.

Qualitative data will be captured through interviews, surveys, and focus groups with program stakeholders, including FMCSA headquarters program office personnel, to understand internal CSA processes and FMCSA field personnel on their use of the Safety Measurement System Component to identify carriers and the Intervention Component to address safety issues before crashes occur. The team will also assess the consistency of enforcement practices across FMCSA field offices. Finally, the team intends to discuss program strengths and weaknesses with program stakeholders.

Evaluation's Timeframe and Logistics: FY 2025-2027. The evaluation will begin with the baseline analysis and literature review followed by qualitative data collections. Existing FMCSA staff will conduct this evaluation. The evaluation team will brief FMCSA leadership on preliminary, actionable findings by the close of FY 2026. FMCSA will complete the final report and develop an action plan in FY 2027.

Anticipated Challenges: There may be data gaps in MCMIS that could make nationwide analysis and comparisons challenging.

5 DOT (2025) "Press Release: The First 100 Days," https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/first-100-days; Executive Office of the President (2025), "Enforcing Commonsense Rules of the Road for America's Truck Drivers," *Federal Register* (28 April), Executive Order 14286, https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/05/02/2025-07786/enforcing-commonsense-rules-of-the-road-for-americas-truck-drivers.

Airspace Modernization

Operating Administration: Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

Summary: Review airspace modernization performance indicators, costs, and benefits, as well as industry's level of equipping aircraft with the appropriate electronic equipment.

Program Overview and Context: Airspace modernization is a large-scale FAA initiative to transform the U.S. National Airspace System (NAS) that was authorized in 2003 by the Vision 100—Century of Aviation Reauthorization Act (Public Law 108-176). Modernization is not defined as one technology, product, or goal. Rather, it is a series of interlinked programs, portfolios, systems, policies, and procedures that seek to fundamentally change aviation. These changes include communications, navigation, and surveillance. Within the scope of modernization are airport infrastructure improvements, new air traffic management technologies, and updated air traffic control procedures. The modernization effort is also facing new challenges and opportunities from the growth of drone traffic, commercial space launches, and new advanced air mobility technologies.

Rationale for Conducting Evaluation: The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the performance of the FAA in delivering and implementing quantifiable operational benefits to the national airspace system through modernization efforts. This evaluation fulfills a Congressional requirement under Section 603 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 (Public Law 118-63).

Key Evaluation Questions

- What has been the modernization effort's effect on operators in the NAS?
- To what extent have modernization efforts achieved their intended impact on operators in the NAS?
- What aspects of the airspace modernization initiative were associated with improvements in NAS operations?

Dissemination Strategy: Upon completion of the evaluation and in compliance with the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, FAA will issue a Congressional report containing findings and recommendations.

Planned Use of Results: FAA will use the evaluation's findings to inform the next steps of the modernization effort. Findings will inform FAA's investment decisions on new operators and their operations, including developing new economic models and benefit cost ratios. The findings will also inform FAA's research priorities.

Evaluation Type, Design, Data Collection Method, and Data Availability: In partnership with the National Academy of Public Administration, the FAA is conducting a full review of costs and benefits, as well as the industry's level of aircraft equipment. The researchers may consult internally with the appropriate FAA offices and externally with aviation industry stakeholders. This will be an outcome evaluation using NAS operational data and data from industry.

Evaluation's Timeframe and Logistics: FY 2026-2027. In FY 2026, the FAA and the National Academy of Public Administration will conduct the evaluation and deliver preliminary, actionable findings on modernization's effect on the NAS to FAA's leadership. By the end of FY 2027, the National Academy of Public Administration will submit a report to the FAA Administrator and Congress on the evaluation's findings and its recommendations.

Anticipated Challenges: Industry participation and access to private, third-party data may be challenges.

Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) Discretionary Grant Program

Operating Administration: Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

Summary: Evaluate the effectiveness of the Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) Program's outreach to communities with the highest-risk crossings, review the technical capacity of eligible applicants to develop applications in response to RCE Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFOs), and identify barriers to submitting applications.

Program Overview and Context: 49 USC § 22909 authorizes the Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) Program to fund highway-rail or pathway-rail grade crossing improvement projects that increase the safety and mobility of people and goods.[6] The RCE Program is authorized for $3 billion from FY 2022 to 2026 or around $600 million per year, and issues grants to certain public sector entities in the U.S. and its territories. FRA is working to address the highest-risk railroad crossings, which it defines as crossings with three or more incidents in the last five fiscal years.

The safest grade crossing is one that does not exist. Grade separating or otherwise eliminating crossings is the most direct way to prevent intrusions into the railroad right-of-way.[7] Highway-rail grade crossing incidents, together with accidents caused by pedestrian trespassing along the railroad right-of-way, account for 94% of all rail-related deaths and injuries. In 2023, there were 963 deaths and 1,426 injuries resulting from grade crossing incidents or trespassing on rail tracks, with trespassing accounting for 74% of deaths.[8]

Rationale for Conducting Evaluation: For FRA to achieve its goal of eliminating or separating the highest-risk crossings across the nation, FRA must receive eligible funding applications that target the highest-risk crossings. The evaluation results will allow FRA to make operational changes that increase awareness of the RCE Program among communities with the highest-risk crossings. It will also build evidence regarding the technical capacity of public entities with the highest-risk crossings to develop eligible RCE Program applications and examine the barriers they may face to submitting an RCE application. This is the first time the RCE Program is being formally evaluated.

Key Evaluation Questions

1. How can FRA better solicit applications from communities with the highest-risk grade crossings?
    - What are the most common types of applicants to the RCE Program, e.g., are the applicants larger planning organizations or smaller local governments? To what extent does this align with the types of potential applicants best able to address the highest-risk crossings in the Nation? To what extent are the communities with the highest-risk rail crossings correlated with the communities that apply for the Program?
    - What are common features of the projects that applicants submit to RCE?

6 Grade crossings are intersections where a highway, street, or its associated sidewalks and pathways crosses a railroad track(s).
7 Grade separations are underpasses or overpasses that provide safe passage from one side of the railroad tracks to the other. References on grade separation safety impacts are available on FRA's *Trespass and Suicide Prevention Toolkit*, https://trespasstoolkit.fra.dot.gov/eLib/Details/L00062.
8 FRA, *FRA Safety Data*, https://data.transportation.gov/stories/s/FRA-Safety-Data/dakf-i7zd.

2. What is the capacity of communities with the highest-risk crossings to apply for RCE grants?
    - What barriers do communities with the highest-risk crossings in the Nation face that prevent them from seeking RCE funding?
    - To what extent do communities with highest-risk crossings have the staff capacity and/or technical ability to identify these crossings and apply for RCE? To what extent do such communities understand all of the eligible activities under RCE, e.g., interventions other than grade separations? To what extent do such communities have access to data that can demonstrate the danger of a particular grade crossing?
    - Which elements of the RCE NOFO and areas of the grant application process do communities with the highest-risk crossings in the Nation find most challenging?

Dissemination Strategy: FRA anticipates issuing a contract for program evaluation services which will include an evaluation report and raw survey data as deliverables. These deliverables will be provided to RCE Program staff. FRA will publicly disseminate both the evaluation report and raw data.

Planned Use of Results: The RCE Program staff will use the evaluation report and data to determine changes or enhancements to its outreach efforts and technical assistance, including but not limited to, the format of outreach, audience targeting strategy, or additional outreach (e.g., webinars, guides) to better inform stakeholders on the RCE Program and to prepare applications for the program. FRA staff may also consider changes to NOFO elements based on the evaluation's results. FRA will apply the findings to improve outreach and technical assistance for other discretionary grant programs, as appropriate. Further, the findings could be used to inform reauthorization of FRA's discretionary grant programs.

Evaluation Type, Design, Data Collection Method, and Data Availability: FRA plans to conduct a process evaluation. FRA will perform market research and solicit proposals to identify the most appropriate evaluation design and data collection methodology.

Evaluation's Timeframe and Logistics: FY 2026-2027. RCE Program staff will answer question 1 in FY 2026 by analyzing administrative data collected by the RCE Program, including applicant data and FRA grade crossing incident history data. This will allow Program staff to develop preliminary findings comparing the profiles of current RCE applicants with communities that have the highest-risk crossings that have not applied, which they will share with FRA leadership in FY 2026. FRA will answer question 2 via an evaluation contract. The contractor will be responsible for administering surveys to relevant communities and analyzing the findings in FY 2027. FRA will issue a final report in FY 2027.

Anticipated Challenges: This evaluation will use qualitative data, which can be difficult to clean and synthesize. Gathering qualitative data via stakeholder interviews depends upon sufficient participation from communities, which may be challenging.

Port Infrastructure Development Grant Program (PIDP)

Operating Administration: Maritime Administration (MARAD)

Summary: Evaluate PIDP to understand how the program is being accessed by ports of different sizes and geographic areas, and the effect of PIDP's implementation processes on public entities' likelihood of submitting an application or receiving funding.

Program Overview and Context: The Nation's more than 300 coastal and inland ports are significant drivers of the U.S. economy, supporting 26% of the nation's total GDP.[9] The Port Infrastructure Development Program (PIDP) provides competitive grants to public entities to improve the safety, efficiency, or reliability of the movement of goods through ports and intermodal connections to ports (46 USC § 50302). It first received appropriations of $292.7 million in FY 2019 and was expanded to $2.25 billion over 2022-2026. It has made awards to 162 projects.

Rationale for Conducting Evaluation: An external assessment will provide an impartial view of MARAD's program execution, and the findings will provide validation and an opportunity to improve and refine how MARAD achieves the program's intended outcomes.

Key Evaluation Questions

1. **Achieving Program Purpose:**
   - Has the PIDP been implemented as intended? How has the PIDP operated in practice? Are eligible ports accessing the program as intended? To what extent does the PIDP address the identified need?
   - How many applicants were from local government, state government, and tribal communities?
2. **Application Process and Webinars:**
   - To what degree was the program application process understood by applicants? To what degree were PIDP informational webinars associated with changes in application outcomes? Was attending a webinar associated with an increased likelihood of submitting an application or an application being funded?

Dissemination Strategy: The findings from this evaluation will be summarized and disseminated in a report that will be made available both internally and externally, including on MARAD's website.

Planned Use of Results: The results of this evaluation will inform improvements to the program. They will also be used to identify efficiencies in the current approach to managing grants. Identifying evidence-based improvements through the evaluation will assist MARAD in delivering on the Administration's priority to reinvigorate the U.S. shipbuilding and maritime industries.[10] These findings will be critical to driving faster outcomes as the PIDP expands under the President's FY 2026 Discretionary Budget Request.[11]

9 American Society of Civil Engineers (2021), *2021 Report Card for America's Infrastructure*, https://infrastructurereportcard.org/.

10 DOT (2025) "Press Release: The First 100 Days," https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/first-100-days; Executive Office of the President (2025) "Restoring America's Maritime Dominance," *Federal Register* (9 April), Executive Order 14269, https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/15/2025-06465/restoring-americas-maritime-dominance.

11 Executive Office of the President (2025) "Correspondence with Honorable Susan Collins," (2 May), https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Fiscal-Year-2026-Discretionary-Budget-Request.pdf.

Evaluation Type, Design, Data Collection Method, and Data Availability: Administrative data available from the program office will be used to analyze and summarize PIDP's implementation progress. This is an implementation evaluation, using an observational design.

Evaluation's Timeframe and Logistics: FY 2026-2027. By the end of FY 2026, the evaluation team will brief MARAD's leadership on preliminary, actionable findings. These preliminary findings will include an impartial view of MARAD's program execution, and program validation, and recommendations to help the program achieve its intended outcomes. Applying the findings of this evaluation will support the development of corrective actions, new policies, and program improvements. The evaluation will conclude in FY 2027, and MARAD will issue a final report. Contractors will conduct the study.

Anticipated Challenges: There is a small dataset based on the number of completed projects at the time of the evaluation. PIDP processes and procedures are currently being revised, and adjustments may be made prior to or during the term of the study. Such changes could complicate efforts to measure PIDP's effectiveness.

Update on Program Evaluations from Prior Annual Evaluation Plans

This section describes progress and results from evaluation activities from prior years' Annual Evaluation Plans, available at DOT's Budget webpage. It responds to reporting requirements established by *OMB Circular A-11's* Section 290.11.[12]

Evaluations in the Planning Phase
FMCSA | Electronic Logging Device (ELD) Rule – Regulatory Effectiveness Review: FMCSA is finalizing the draft report, which it expects to circulate for internal review in spring 2025.
FMCSA | Effectiveness of the Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse Rule Data Reporting and Use: FMCSA is finalizing the draft report, which it expects to circulate for internal review in spring 2025.
FMCSA | Effectiveness of the Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program (MCSAP): FMCSA expects to begin this evaluation in FY 2026 following the completion of two OIG audits.
FMCSA | Entry Level Driver Training (ELDT) Provider Registry: FMCSA has begun the literature review and expects to begin the evaluation by summer 2025.
FRA | Automated Track Inspection Program: Design is underway. No contractor in place yet.
FRA | Grade Crossing Grant Benefits: Contractor is conducting initial data collection.
FRA | Northeast Corridor (NEC) Project Inventory: FRA is determining the logistical approach it will take to complete this evaluation.
FHWA | Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Discretionary Grant Program: In the planning stage and briefing the new Administration.

12 OMB (2024), *Circular A-11*, Section 290.11.

Evaluations That Are Currently Underway
FTA | Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Pilot Program: The evaluation team has collected data, including document review using the Transit Award Management System (TrAMS) and focus groups with FTA regional office staff. Using a Paperwork Reduction Act clearance, the team is collecting online survey data with TOD transit recipients and will collect focus group responses from a subset of online survey participants. Issuing the final report in FY 2026.
FTA | State of Good Repair (SGR) Formula Program: The evaluation team finalized the program's logic model and began collecting document review data using the Transit Award Management System (TrAMS) and the National Transit Database (NTD) on safety, system performance, and accessibility metrics reported among recipients of SGR formula funds. Issuing the final report in FY 2027.
NHTSA | National Impaired Driving Paid Media Campaign: Developed and conducted cognitive testing of English questionnaire and survey invitation materials. The Privacy Threshold Assessment has been submitted for adjudication, and NHTSA is preparing the Paperwork Reduction Act package for submission in mid-2025.
NHTSA | "Click It Or Ticket" Evaluation: Final work plan and survey data collection plan. NHTSA is preparing the Paperwork Reduction Act package for submission in mid-2025 and designing the survey instrument.
OST | Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program: OST completed Phase 1 of the evaluation, including documenting baselines and data gathering on near-term impacts for the six projects that received capital construction grants in the FY 2022 award cycle. Phase 2 work is ongoing, including analysis of applications and awards programmatic data from three cycles and project analysis of subsets of capital construction and planning grants from the FY 2022 and FY 2023 award cycles.
PHMSA | Natural Gas Distribution Infrastructure Safety and Modernization (NGDISM) Grant Program: PHMSA is conducting data collection and analysis.

Completed Evaluations
FAA | Airport Terminal Program (ATP): FAA completed the evaluation and briefed the program's leadership on its findings to inform future decision making.
FHWA | Enterprise Assessment of the Focused Approach Safety: The evaluation was completed, and findings were distributed to the leadership of relevant offices via email.
FHWA | Oversight of State and Local Entities Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): The evaluation was completed, and findings were distributed to the leadership of relevant offices via email.
FHWA | State Performance Management Program: The evaluation was completed, and findings were distributed to the leadership of relevant offices via email.
FRA | Operation Lifesaver (OLI): FRA is assessing the report recommendations to determine which to implement. FRA published the technical report with findings here: https://railroads.dot.gov/elibrary/operation-lifesaver-inc-process-evaluation
FRA | Very Long Trains (VLT) Study: The report indicated that some FRA existing actions should continue. Findings area available here: https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/impacts-of-trains-longer-than-7500-feet
MARAD | State Maritime Academies (SMA) Recruitment and Enrollment Strategies: Final report completed in July 2024. Results will be shared with the SMAs to help improve effectiveness of recruitment and enrollment strategies.

Evaluations Canceled Due to Changes in Priorities and Resources
FAA | Efficacy of the Program Management Maturity Model (PM3) within Security and Hazardous Materials Safety Organization (ASH)
PHMSA | Evaluation of Outreach to Underserved Communities in the Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness Grant Program

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