

Utah stepping up multimodal planning and investment under new law

By Chris McCahill

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Transportation decisionmaking is changing in Utah, thanks to the state's [SB136](#), which passed earlier this year. The bill garnered attention in part because it reforms the governance of the Utah Transit Authority, but UDOT is also moving forward on other important aspects, including adding a new deputy director, developing a strategic multimodal vision, and supporting the development of new project prioritization criteria.

UDOT's new deputy director, [Teri Newell](#), took the position in April after serving as a project manager and a regional director at the agency. In accordance with the bill, she's now the second deputy director at the agency charged specifically with planning and prioritizing transportation projects (as opposed to engineering and operations).

In her new role, Newell will work with the state's Transportation Commission to update written prioritization criteria for highway capacity projects, and for the first time develop prioritization criteria for transit projects, which will now be eligible for state funding. UDOT will make sure those criteria align with the agency's strategic vision. These criteria may include consideration of access to opportunities and local land use plans, according to the bill.

Andrew Gruber, Executive Director of the [Wasatch Front Regional Council](#), Utah's largest Metropolitan Planning Organization with headquarters in Salt Lake City, called the bill a "game changer." "Utah has a long history of collaborative, multi-modal transportation planning and investing," Gruber said. "Now, under SB136, the state will evaluate land use and economic development in the prioritization of funding for road and transit projects, as part of the broader effort to ensure that the transportation system advances our shared vision and goals."

Virginia went through a similar process in 2015, after the passage of HB2. The state now scores all transportation projects based on five to six criteria—safety, congestion relief, accessibility, environmental impact, economic development, and land use—under its [Smart Scale](#) program. Virginia's past transportation secretary, Aubrey Lane, [said the process](#), "fully funds the right projects so they can be delivered benefiting all regions of the state in an equitable way."

Among other changes, Utah's bill also requires UDOT to develop a mileage-based user fee pilot program, creates a new transit fund, raises registration fees for electric vehicles, and offers new taxing options for local governments to fund transportation projects.