National Bureau of Economic Research

Economics of Transportation in the 21st Century
Virtual Meeting—October 16, 2026

To promote research in transportation economics and to strengthen the economic foundations for transportation policies in the 21st century, the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), with the support of the US Department of Transportation, is carrying out a multi-year research initiative on "Transportation Economics in the 21st Century." This initiative, led by NBER researchers Edward Glaeser (Harvard University), James Poterba (MIT), and Stephen Redding (Stanford University), brings together researchers in various subfields of economics to study issues of current importance in the transportation sector and to develop an agenda for future research.

The NBER will host a virtual conference on Friday, October 16, 2026, to showcase new findings in transportation economics. It will address a range of possible topics, including but not limited to:

- The potential economic effects of automation in both the light duty vehicle fleet and the freight transport sector on the cost of transportation services, the markets for related services such as insurance, and the demand for both capital and labor in the transportation sector.
- The returns to, and financing of, investments in transportation infrastructure, including roads, rail, air, pipelines, ports, and liquid natural gas terminals.
- The economic analysis of maintenance and utilization of transportation infrastructure, with reference to the potential role for public-private partnerships and lessons from such partnerships in the US or elsewhere.
- The impact of the transportation sector on the broader economy, including its effects on the labor market, the employment prospects for workers at various skill levels, and the competitiveness of the US economy and its various constituent sectors.
- Transportation safety and the impact of new technologies, such as in-vehicle tests for sobriety and new vehicle design features.
- The role of new data generated by both the private and public sectors, and new analytical methods such as those associated with AI in improving the delivery of transportation services and return on public investments in the transportation sector.
- The role of transportation in affecting the structure of economic activity within urban areas and the spatial distribution of economic activity between rural and urban areas.
- The measurement of the benefits and costs of, and willingness to pay for, transport infrastructure improvements, including through the use of market-based pricing mechanisms.

To be considered for inclusion on the program, papers must be uploaded by **11:59pm ET on Thursday, September 3, 2026**, via the following link:

https://conference.nber.org/confsubmit/backend/cfp?id=ETf26

All papers should include a comprehensive conflict of interest statement that describes any financial or other interests that the researchers might have regarding the research. Submission of papers by researchers with and without NBER affiliations and from early career scholars are welcome. Please do not submit papers that will be published by October 2026.

Decisions about which papers will be included on the program will be announced by mid-September. Please feel free to forward this call to others who might be conducting research on related topics. Questions about this meeting may be directed to confer@nber.org.