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## Memorandum

Date: November 10, 2020

Subject: INFORMATION: Audit Announcement | FHWA's Tunnel Safety Program |  
Project No. 20S3010S000  
Federal Highway Administration

From: David Pouliott   
Assistant Inspector General for Surface Transportation Audits

To: Federal Highway Administrator

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In accordance with the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act of 2012,<sup>1</sup> the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) established a national highway tunnel safety program, and in 2015, issued standards for tunnel inventory and inspection.<sup>2</sup> According to FHWA, the standards aim to ensure that tunnel inspections uncover safety problems and prevent failures. In 2018, however, a section of electrical conduit fell from the ceiling of a tunnel in Pennsylvania, hit a truck's windshield, and killed the vehicle's driver. In August 2020, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) reported that long-term corrosion caused the electrical conduit's support system to fail.<sup>3</sup> NTSB also found that due to insufficient guidance from FHWA on tunnel maintenance and inspection, the tunnel's owner did not sufficiently prioritize repairs.

Given the importance of FHWA's role in the oversight of tunnel safety, we are initiating this audit to assess the Agency's progress in implementing its tunnel safety program. Specifically, we will focus on FHWA's actions to maintain the national tunnel inventory, conduct program compliance reviews, and address critical risks to tunnel safety.

We plan to begin this audit immediately and will contact your audit liaison to schedule an entrance conference. We will conduct our work at FHWA Headquarters and other sites as needed, and with information systems related to

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<sup>1</sup> Pub. L. No. 112-141 (2012), section 1111; codified at 23 U.S.C. § 144.

<sup>2</sup> 80 FR 41350 (2015); codified at 23 CFR § 650, subpart E.

<sup>3</sup> NTSB, *Failure of Overhead Electrical Conduit Support System in Lehigh Tunnel and Subsequent Truck-Tractor Crash, I-476, East Penn Township, Pennsylvania, February 21, 2018*, highway accident brief (NTSB/HAB-20/04), August 4, 2020.

tunnel safety.<sup>4</sup> If you have any questions, please contact me at 202-366-5630 or Tony Wysocki, Program Director, at 202-493-0223.

cc: DOT Audit Liaison, M-1  
FHWA Audit Liaison, HCFB-32

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<sup>4</sup> FHWA's information systems related to tunnel safety include a national tunnel inventory, a national tunnel inspection program application, a critical finding database, and an internal Agency website.