Who Picks the Route?

How federal funding and state choices shape public policy

OKH.P.2.1.B "Evaluate the impact of the structure and powers exercised by governmental systems on public policy, using historical and contemporary examples."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two ways the national government shaped these policies. Circle two decisions left to states, then number one benefit and one possible harm caused by those decisions.

From Highways to Chargers

1. In 1956, Congress passed the Federal-Aid Highway Act to build a national interstate system. The national government offered to pay 90 percent of approved interstate construction costs, while states supplied the rest and planned routes. That funding gave Washington leverage: states that wanted the money had to meet federal highway standards. But state and local route decisions also shaped what people experienced. Some roads shortened trips between cities, while routes through established neighborhoods displaced residents and businesses. The policy was not simply a command from one capital; it emerged from national spending power and state decisions about where pavement went.

2. In 2021, Congress passed a law that funded a national network of electric vehicle chargers along major roads. Under its National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure program, each state submits a plan for using its share of federal funds. Federal officials review the plans and set requirements for chargers paid for by the program. State transportation agencies choose proposed locations and work with private companies to install chargers. A state might prioritize a highway stop near a small town, while another might focus on a busier corridor. The federal government can steer the network through money and rules, but states make important choices on the ground.

3. Both policies reveal a trade-off in a federal system. Congress can collect taxes and fund projects that cross state borders, making a connected network possible. States can respond to local conditions, but their route or site choices may distribute benefits unevenly. Federal standards can limit variation, yet they cannot by themselves decide which neighborhoods or towns gain easy access. For highways, a shorter drive could come with lost homes along a route. For chargers, a driver may still face a long gap if useful stops are not built nearby. To evaluate either policy, ask whose power shaped the final locations and who benefited.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Congress's funding power influence state highway policy in 1956?

2. How could state route decisions change who gained and who lost from the highway policy?

3. Why could the 2021 charger program build a national network but still produce different results among states?

4. Which level of government has more control over proposed charger locations? Support your judgment with evidence from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine Congress funds a national flood-barrier program, sets minimum safety rules, and lets states select building sites. In four or five sentences, predict one benefit and one risk for residents, then judge whether Congress or states would have more control over who receives protection. Use evidence from both examples in the passage.

ANSWER KEY

Who Picks the Route?

HIGH SCHOOL · OKH.P.2.1.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two ways the national government shaped these policies. Circle two decisions left to states, then number one benefit and one possible harm caused by those decisions. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Congress's funding power influence state highway policy in 1956?	**Congress offered to cover 90 percent of approved interstate construction costs, giving states a strong reason to build highways that met federal standards.**
2	How could state route decisions change who gained and who lost from the highway policy?	**A chosen route could shorten trips for drivers while displacing residents and businesses in neighborhoods it crossed.**
3	Why could the 2021 charger program build a national network but still produce different results among states?	**Federal funding and requirements support a national network, but states propose sites based on their priorities. Those choices can leave drivers with different levels of access.**
4	Which level of government has more control over proposed charger locations? Support your judgment with evidence from the passage.	**States have more control over proposed locations because state transportation agencies choose them. Federal officials review state plans and set requirements, which limit that choice.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

National funding could help states build barriers they could not afford alone. The barriers could protect homes, but state site choices might leave some communities exposed. In the highway program, state route choices affected which neighborhoods lost homes; in the charger program, states propose sites within federal requirements. States would have more control over who receives protection because they select the barrier sites, even though Congress controls funding and safety rules.

Accept judgments that recognize both federal conditions and state control over site choices. Responses should connect a predicted benefit and risk to evidence from both passage examples.