

March 7, 2019 [View this email in your browser](#)



## CONGRESS BRIEF

### *Reauthorization IS the Infrastructure Package*

Earlier this week, NARC's Deputy Director Erich Zimmermann met with Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee majority and minority staff. Committee staff are meeting with a variety of stakeholder organizations to learn about stakeholder priorities and answer questions. Perhaps the most enlightening part of the discussion came in the opening minutes. When asked what NARC's transportation priorities are, Erich asked whether we are talking about an infrastructure package or a reauthorization bill. The response: the reauthorization bill IS the infrastructure package. In other words, they are working toward an early reauthorization of the FAST Act (remember, it does not expire until September 2020) this year, and will consider adding some additional sections to create a larger package that would then constitute an infrastructure package. There is reportedly agreement on this approach from the other Senate committees with jurisdiction (Commerce, Banking, and Finance). The underlying emphasis was clear: reauthorization of the FAST Act is the Senate's priority.

EPW's plan is to collect member requests next week, start the committee process by the end of June, and pass a bill out of committee by the August recess. That would leave three months to get it through the full Senate, with a completion target of the end of 2019 or very early 2020. They plan to continue to rely on formula-distributed funding and indicated they do not anticipate any wholesale changes to the current structure of the program. As for priorities, one area where both sides agreed was on the need for a climate title (though their approaches are going to be very different). Majority staff also mentioned additional streamlining, both environmental and process, and rural roads. Minority staff highlighted freight and performance-based planning and programming and disagreed with the idea of additional environmental streamlining.

This is the beginning of a process to be sure, but a process that could move much faster than we might have otherwise anticipated if the Senate has its way.

### **House Ways and Means Hearing: Our Nation's Crumbling Infrastructure and The Need for Immediate Action**

Taking a vital step toward a robust transportation package this Congress, the House Ways and Means Committee yesterday held a hearing to discuss the important need for more money to maintain and improve the nation's infrastructure. The Highway Trust Fund needs immediate cash flow before it runs to zero in 2021. In addition, roads, bridges and highways in poor conditions cost individuals and businesses in measurable financial ways. At the hearing, funding models for investment were discussed in depth as members debated the use of a gas tax, VMT-based fee, and public-private partnerships as tools for creating revenue. The rural-urban divide was also discussed throughout. There were also conversations about creating stronger broadband infrastructure, water systems, disaster resilient communities and affordable housing while also addressing the effects of climate change. For detailed notes, [see NARC's analysis from the hearing](#).

### **Don Young Now Longest Serving House Republican**

On Wednesday, Rep. Don Young (R-AK) became the longest-serving Republican in House of Representatives history, surpassing former Speaker Joseph Cannon (R-IL) after whom a House office building is named. Young's 46 years in the House leave him just 18 months shy of becoming the longest serving Republican on the Hill; he is unlikely, however, to catch the late John Dingell (D-MI) who served 59 years in the House.

Young has played an important role in recent federal transportation history, serving as Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee from 2001-2007, and has been a central figure in the career of this writer. I remember vividly, as a newcomer to Washington politics and federal transportation legislation, when then-Chairman Young (alongside Ranking Member Jim Oberstar (D-MN)) stood before a gathering in the T&I hearing room and confidently predicted that he would raise the federal gas tax by a nickel to support his nearly \$400 billion transportation reauthorization bill. He seemed so sure of it at the time. My cynicism about such proclamations is much deeper now.

When the gas tax increase failed to materialize, what resulted was the \$286 billion SAFETEA-LU, which Young made his own by naming it for his now-late wife, Lu, and by stuffing it with more than 6,300 earmarks with the help of Sen. Ted Stevens (R-AK). It was during the SAFETEA-LU era that the transportation program required its first infusion of cash from the general fund to remain afloat, and the earmarks in the bill ("Bridge to Nowhere" anyone?) eventually led to the Republicans turning off the earmark tap completely and to Young being investigated for his ties to the earmark king, Jack Abramoff. He has been a complicated Congressional career, and now it is a historically long career. Hats off to Don Young.

### **Senate EPW Hearing on the Economic Benefits of Highway Infrastructure Investment and Accelerated Project Delivery**

Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (EPW) held a hearing this week focused on economic benefits of investing in infrastructure and ways to accelerate project delivery, while preserving important environmental protections. Some of the areas of discussion include the ability of federal infrastructure policy to advance local efforts that aim to create safer streets, mitigate congestion and reduce the transportation sector's large carbon footprint; on creating systems that expedite projects that are responsive to local needs, which can include a streamlined environmental review process; and maintaining states' flexibility to engage in investment decision making.

## **REGIONS BRIEF**

### **Congressman Issues Statement on Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project**

Critical local stakeholders in the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project have made escalating demands that Congressman Price (D-NC) says, "unravel years of hard work to improve our region's economic competitiveness and quality of life." The project, which is broadly supported by voters, the business community, and a diverse array of community leaders, is now facing a historic setback that could cost millions and undo twenty years of hard work. While Congressman Price expressed his frustrations he also reiterated that he is committed to, "continuing to work with local partners in support of expanding public transit alternatives for our region."

### **New Jersey to Require Pre-Tax Perk for Transit Costs**

A new law in New Jersey requires that employers with more than 20 employees give workers the option to set aside wages on a pre-tax basis for qualifying transportation costs. The pre-tax benefit will reduce the financial burden of fares and parking costs, helping hundreds of thousands of New Jersey commuters.

### **Musk-Owned Firm Recommended to Build Vegas Transit System**

Las Vegas's tourism agency announced earlier this week that it has recommended Elon Musk's Boring Company build an underground tunnel transportation system. The project, if approved, would carry passengers in autonomous electric vehicles at high speeds through a mile-long system adjacent to the city's massive conference center complex at an estimated cost of \$35 - \$55 million. Musk's company has also been tapped to build underground tunnels in both Los Angeles and

Chicago, though skepticism around the concept still exists. The proposed tunnel would have a competition date of 2021 if plans are approved later this month.

## JOBS

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### **Planner, Principal**

Posted: 3/07/2019

Atlanta Regional Commission, Atlanta, GA

### **Planner, Senior**

Posted: 3/07/2019

Atlanta Regional Commission, Atlanta, GA

### **Planner, Principal**

Posted: 3/07/2019

Atlanta Regional Commission, Atlanta, GA

### **Executive Director**

Posted: 3/07/2019

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Springfield, MA

### **Assistant Planner (2 Positions Open)**

Posted: 3/06/2019

Puget Sound Regional Council, Seattle, WA

## OPPORTUNITIES

*[View full list opportunities!](#)*

### **NATCO Webinar – Getting to Vision Zero: Rethinking Large Vehicles on City Streets**

Friday March 15<sup>th</sup> – 12:00 PM EST

Large vehicles disproportionately impact safety on city streets. Join NACTO, the USDOT Volpe Center, New York City, and Seattle to see how cities are leading the way in transforming how we use large vehicles on our streets, from comprehensive purchasing strategies to new models for delivering freight on city streets.

### **Data Tools for Walking, Biking and Safe Routes to School Decision-Making**

Tuesday March 17<sup>th</sup> – 1:00 PM EST

Learn more about tools being developed to understand data surrounding walking, biking and Safe Routes to School, and how to use this information to make decisions about active travel investments.

## CONTACT US

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