



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

TRANSPORTATION THURSDAYS

## CONGRESS BRIEF

### House Passes Rail Reauthorization

In a **316-101** vote, the U.S. House of Representatives yesterday passed the *Passenger Rail Reform and Investment Act of 2015* (PRRIA; **H.R. 749**), which authorizes Amtrak passenger rail for four years. The bill makes some structural changes to Amtrak's funding, creating separate accounts for the Northeast Corridor and the National Network, and the creation of a Northeast Corridor Investment Plan. It includes a pilot program that would allow for private bids to run service in lieu of Amtrak, at no more than 90 percent of what Amtrak spent in the previous year. It would also require Amtrak to consider ways to monetize its right-of-way and encourage development around its stations.

### Local Chambers of Commerce Request Transportation Action

A letter signed by 260 local chambers of commerce asks Congress to solve the impending insolvency of the Highway Trust Fund, ensure that federal funds are flexible enough to support all modes of transportation, and "empower local communities and metropolitan regions with more authority over both federal funding and decision-making."

### Sequester Lurking for Transportation

House Appropriations Transportation-HUD Subcommittee Chairman Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL) indicated that he would submit a spending bill that abides by the sequester caps. The result would be a bill with little increase for USDOT. Just two years ago, House leaders pushed a bill that stuck to sequester caps, and it caused a bi-partisan backlash that led to the bill being pulled from the floor.

## ADMINISTRATION BRIEF

### New Initiative Hopes to Boost Local Workers

Today, Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx **announced** a proposed pilot program to make **hiring local residents** for transportation projects easier. The pilot program includes a rulemaking process to alter contracting rules that currently prohibit local hire provisions. The program will allow agencies to test and evaluate the merits of current provisions, and determine how the competitive bidding process can be improved.

### New Campaign to Improve Rail Crossing Safety

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) recently announced the launch of a new campaign intended to improve safety at grade crossings. This campaign solicits the help of law enforcement to increase visibility of crossings and write citations to drivers who violate rules of the road at rail crossings. Subsequent phases will include increased use of technology and increased public awareness.

### New Rulemaking on State Safety Oversight

This rulemaking would replace the regulations for State Safety Oversight (SSO) of rail fixed guideway public transportation systems in place for the past twenty years, and significantly strengthen the program to prevent and mitigate accidents on those systems. The purpose of this rulemaking is to carry out several explicit statutory mandates established by Congress in MAP-21, strengthen the States' oversight of their

rail transit systems, and ensure that the States' regulatory agencies have the necessary enforcement authority, finances, and human resources for this purpose.

### **John Oliver on Infrastructure**

In case you missed it, comedian John Oliver took a serious look at the state of the nation's infrastructure, highlighting how ridiculous it is that our government fails to invest in roads, bridges, dams, and other facilities. You'll laugh because it's better than crying!

## **REGIONS BRIEF**

### **Seattle Uses Income-Based Transit Prices**

The transit agency for the Seattle, Washington metropolitan area began providing discounts on trips for residents making less than \$47,000 annually for a family of four. To qualify, residents must register for a smart-card that charges only \$1.50 per ride. This program is the first of its kind at this scale, and has many other metropolitan areas taking notice.

## **JOBS**

*[View full list of jobs!](#)*

### **Transportation Planner II**

Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments, Toledo, OH

### **Active Transportation Planner**

Wasatch Front Regional Council, Salt Lake City, UT

### **Transportation Planner/Engineer**

Wasatch Front Regional Council, Salt Lake City, UT

### **Transportation Engineer/Planner**

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, Philadelphia, PA

### **Planner/Research Analyst**

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, Philadelphia, PA

### **Transportation Planner**

Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission, Dayton, OH

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

*[View full list of grants and events!](#)*

### **Webinar: Developing Future Sea Level Rise and Storm Surge Scenarios.**

March 10, 2:00-3:30 PM ET

This webinar will provide methods for regional analysis of vulnerability to sea level rise and coastal storms.

### **Webinar: 'Let's Talk Performance' Series: Fundamentals of Transportation Data, Part 1**

March 10, 2:00-3:30 PM ET

Presenters will showcase examples of how their agencies began developing their transportation data programs, and how they work with others to manage data. Presenters will share examples of how their agencies overcame leadership, internal IT, and resource issues that inhibited their ability to create data management and performance data programs.

### **Webinar: Every Day Counts: Best Practices in Programmatic Agreements**

March 17, 2:30-4:00 PM ET

As part of the Every Day Counts initiative, FHWA promoted the use of Programmatic Approaches (PAs), which include programmatic agreements that shorten project delivery times. Specifically, PAs establish a streamlined process for handling routine environmental requirements for commonly executed project types. Qualitative support for PAs includes improving cultural and environmental resource protection, communication, and collaboration; however, limited quantitative reporting of these benefits exists.

### **Webinar: Talking Freight Seminar: An Overview of MARAD'S StrongPorts Program**

March 18, 1:00 – 2:30 pm ET

To increase port capacity, the USDOT Maritime Administration (MARAD) created the StrongPorts Program. This new program is focused on improving ports' freight efficiencies, promoting critical port infrastructure projects, and more broadly enhancing U.S. global economic competitiveness. To achieve these goals, the program concentrates on three core areas: planning and engagement, financing, and project support. The StrongPorts Program goals are achieved in part by strengthening planning coordination efforts between ports and state DOTs, MPOs, and municipal transportation agencies.

**CONTACT US**