



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

TRANSPORTATION THURSDAYS

NARC Member Call! NARC's Policies and Priorities for 2018

March 14, 3:30 – 4:30 PM ET - *Please note the new time.*

Dial: (571) 317-3122 / Access code: 304-259-525

Take a look at **NARC's policies and priorities for 2018** and join us for a member call to review these policies and priorities, explain how NARC staff are working toward achieving these objectives, and share best practices and tips for educating and influencing Congress. Contact Neil Bomberg (202.618.6360, neil@narc.org) or Maci Morin (202.618.5691, maci.morin@narc.org) with questions.

CONGRESS BRIEF

Infrastructure Hearings This Week

Two hearings by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee this week focused on the administration's infrastructure proposal and funding transportation. On Tuesday, the committee heard from Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao on the administration's infrastructure proposal. Despite the **hearing's intended topic**, Chao also fielded many questions about the New York and New Jersey Gateway rail project. She stated that the president is concerned about the viability of the project and that New York and New Jersey need to provide a greater share of the project's costs. Lawmakers also pressed her on recent comments President Trump reportedly made to House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) to kill the project. Chao said she didn't know, but that the reports are probably true and ended the conversation by telling lawmakers to ask the White House. The secretary did not provide many more details on the infrastructure plan nor did she come forward with any pay-fors during the hearing. She did reveal that the current \$500 million round of TIGER grant awards could be announced as early as this week.

Yesterday's hearing before the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit focused on long-term funding. Both Chairman Bill Shuster (R-PA) and ranking member Peter DeFazio (D-OR) called on the White House to increase the gas tax to fix the Highway Trust Fund. One of the more interesting exchanges, with Michael Lewis, executive director of the Colorado DOT, testified on behalf of the Western Road Use Charge Consortium and revealed that the idea of a mileage-based user fee is not ready for deployment and will require additional testing. Though there was agreement among the panel that an increase in the gas tax is the most viable solution in the near term, House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) dismissed the idea in a call to an Americans for Prosperity town hall, indicating the House will not approve an increase to the federal gas tax.

Public Lobbying Heats Up on Senate Self-Driving Car Bill

More than 100 supporters signed a letter urging the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee to move the *AV START Act (S.1885)* vote before the August recess. A competing letter from safety advocates, bicyclists, disability communities, and first responders called on Senate leaders to make changes to the bill before allowing a floor vote. The *AV START Act* proposes a national framework to regulate autonomous cars but leaves out trucking provisions. Committee Chairman John Thune (R-SD) has been working to clear the bill under unanimous consent, but several Democratic senators have spoken against the bill and are concerned about several issues, including safety and preemption of state and local authority.

Senate Democrats Release Their Own Infrastructure Plan

The *Jobs & Infrastructure Plan For America's Workers* is the Senate Democrats \$1 trillion infrastructure proposal, paid for by rolling back tax cuts from the Republican tax bill. The proposal sets aside \$140 billion to repair roads and bridges, \$115 billion to modernize water and sewer infrastructure, \$115 billion to repair and improve public transportation, \$50 billion to modernize rail infrastructure, and \$10 billion for TIGER grants among other categories. The plan also includes a \$3 billion increase for the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), which is used by states and MPOs for smaller-scale projects and \$16 billion for Transportation Performance Incentive Funds. While this plan joins several others, including the president's proposal, all face uncertain legislative futures.

ADMINISTRATION BRIEF

Tax Law Infrastructure Impacts

Despite indications that the 2017 Republican tax bill would like additional private activity to modernize the nation's infrastructure, a recent *Bloomberg Law* article concludes that the tax bill may limit the number of public-private partnerships (P3s) for infrastructure due to a last-minute wording change. The tax act limits breaks for payments from government entities to private companies unless they are tied to a "master development plan," which could limit undertakings that do not fall under this new standard. The new law also requires the master development plan to have been approved prior to the law's enactment, so tax breaks for P3s won't be available for projects that are not yet fully planned. This is causing confusion for existing arrangements and prompting restructuring discussions for those entities planning to use this tool. David M. Van Slyke, dean of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University believes this will slow the initial rush for P3s but could result in more successful partnerships down the road.

No Agreement from White House Biofuels Meeting

The president has been trying to address concerns regarding possible changes to the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) through several meetings with industry representatives and corn- and oil-state lawmakers in recent weeks. The RFS requires biofuels be added to the nation's transportation fuels, and is opposed by Senators Ted Cruz (R-TX) and Patrick Toomey (R-PA). Part of the debate is around capping the price of Renewable Identification Numbers (RINS), which are tradable credits used to track the compliance. Corn and ethanol supporters warn that caps would hurt biofuel sales, and they are advocating for year-round sales of E-85 (gasoline containing 15 percent ethanol), which is restricted in the summer due to smog pollution. After two meetings with the president the group still has not reached an agreement.

Inspector General Criticizes TIGER Grant Process

An audit from the USDOT inspector general on the TIGER grant process calls for standardizing the approach to benefit-cost analyses so each applicant is held to the same standard. The report criticizes USDOT for reviewing applications differently and proposed recommendations for improving the process, including creating a standardized benefit-cost analysis review template.

NARC and NLC Respond to Requests for Comments

NARC and the National League of Cities (NLC) submitted joint comments to two FTA Requests for Comments (RFC) and one FHWA Request for Information related to automated vehicles and buses. The comments emphasized the need for funding and open dialogue with the federal government and private sector to deploy autonomous vehicles. The FTA RFCs were titled *Research Programs: Automated Transit Buses* (see [joint comments](#)) and *Removing Barriers to Transit Bus Automation* (see [joint comments](#)) and the FHWA request was titled *Automated Driving Systems* (see [joint comments](#)).

Humped-profile At-grade Railroad Crossings

FHWA and FRA put out a joint statement as a reminder on how to address existing grade crossing locations. The design standard is recommended by the American Railway Engineering and Maintenance-of-Way Association (AREMA) *Manual for Railway Engineering* and has been adopted by AASHTO.

REGIONS BRIEF

County Leaders Not Giving Up Fight on Exemption Nixed in Tax Overhaul

Restoring “advance refunding” bonds and pushing for new rural infrastructure dollars that flow directly from the federal government to localities are two priorities that local officials are pushing for this year. Advance refunding on municipal bonds was an important tool that local governments had in their toolbox to finance roads, waterworks, and other infrastructure – without this tool, how will localities jumpstart the infrastructure projects their communities need? On the topic of direct funding to counties, National Association of Counties Executive Director Matt Chase said, “Why should the governor get the money for infrastructure if they own, literally, less than 8 percent of the roads? We like the concept of rural infrastructure, but the money should go to those levels of government that actually own the infrastructure.” See [NARC's One-Pager](#) on what regions need in an infrastructure package.

JOBS

[View full list of jobs!](#)

Travel Demand Modeler

Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, Detroit, MI

OPPORTUNITIES

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

Learning While Doing Asset Management

March 13, 2:00 – 3:30 PM ET

This webinar will feature presenters from Connecticut DOT (CTDOT) and Wyoming DOT (WYDOT) who will share their experiences and what they have learned while working to build their transportation asset management plans. Additionally, FHWA will briefly review the resources available to aid agencies with implementing transportation asset management plans.

Evaluating Stressors and Their Influences on Ecological Conditions and American Indian/Alaska Native Children’s Health and Well-being

March 13, 3:00 – 4:30 PM ET

Children’s exposures to chemical and non-chemical stressors from their everyday environment affect their overall health and well-being. Children in some communities, such as those from American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Tribes, face a disproportionately greater burden of adverse health and well-being outcomes when compared to other children in the U.S. This seminar will summarize research that aims to evaluate interrelationships between stressors from AI/AN children’s environments and how these stressors influence their health and well-being.

A Winning Public Involvement Approach for LRTPs

March 20, 2:00 – 3:00 PM ET

How can you captivate the public to collect input for your long-range transportation plan? Make it visual. Gamify it. Map it. Join the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments for an insider view of their brilliant approach to public outreach. Learn how they identified local issues with map markers, educated citizens with visual preference surveys, and uncovered local priorities with online rankings. They engaged over 4,000 residents! The result? A 2045 Regional Transportation Plan that reflects local values.

Knowledge Management Resource to Support Strategic Workforce Development for Transit Agencies

March 27, 2:00 – 3:30 PM ET

Based on *TCRP Report 194: Knowledge Management Resource to Support Strategic Workforce Development for Transit Agencies* explores the importance of knowledge management (KM), which is an organization’s process for collecting, storing, and sharing organizational information and knowledge, and provides guidance on implementing KM strategies in transit agencies. The presenters will discuss action plans for developing particular aspects of KM, analysis of KM strategies at several transit agencies, and a catalog of KM technology tools and resources, which are all available in the report.

TAM Webinar Series: Major Capital Replacements

March 28, 2:00 – 3:00 PM ET

FTA will host a webinar to review how two different agencies handle major capital replacements in their TAM planning processes. The webinar will feature presentations from Cobb Community Transit and Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA). The webinar will highlight, among other topics, incorporating new assets and major capital replacements into TAM plans and inventories.

CONTACT US

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