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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

June 19, 2014

Transportation Thursdays

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ADMINISTRATIVE BRIEF

Secretary Foxx Highlights NARC Conference Remarks: Many of you were lucky enough to hear U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx speak at our Annual Conference in Louisville last Wednesday. Sec. Foxx followed up his remarks with an excellent blog post, referencing his own experiences as mayor of Charlotte, NC and head of their metropolitan planning organization. He also highlighted the need for a short-term HTF funding solution and to elaborate on what the Administration's *GROW AMERICA Act* hopes to do for local control. "Today, 65 percent of America's population live in metropolitan areas – and 95 percent of all the transit miles traveled are traveled there. Metropolitan regions are the engines of our economy. Yet only eight percent of core federal-aid highway funds are under local control. We need to fix that, and *GROW AMERICA* will." Click [HERE](#) to read the blog.

President Signs WRRDA: Last week, President Obama put his signature on the long-awaited *Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 (WRRDA)*, which authorizes Army Corps of Engineers research and capital projects. The bill was many years overdue as Congress struggled to find a way forward on a bill that was historically entirely earmarked. The President used the signing

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ceremony to urge Congress to pass a long-term transportation reauthorization this summer. Read a summary of WRRDA [HERE](#) and the President's remarks [HERE](#).

Federal Report Emphasizes the Importance of Construction: An interesting report by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis points a finger at a sluggish rebound in construction as a primary cause for overall continued weakness in U.S. labor markets. Though a recent Bureau of Labor Statistics report shows that all U.S. jobs lost during the Great Recession have been regained, construction continues to lag. The report clearly links the health of the construction sector – and therefore transportation and infrastructure investment – to the overall health of the U.S. economy. Click [HERE](#) for the report.

LEGISLATIVE BRIEF

Highway Trust Fund: Short-Term Fix, Part One: Earlier this week, U.S. Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden (D-OR) announced his intention to develop a short term infusion into the rapidly diminishing Highway Trust Fund (HTF), to keep it operating past the anticipated late July default. Sen. Wyden's approach would extend the HTF for another six months, at a cost of approximately \$10 billion. The missing piece is how Sen. Wyden intends to pay for the patch, but Ranking Member Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT) has stated he believes that workable, short-term HTF funding solutions exist.

Highway Trust Fund: Short-Term Fix, Part Two: One funding idea that has already died on the vine is the U.S. House of Representatives' proposal to pay for the HTF patch by eliminating Saturday mail service. This proposal has a number of practical problems, and when numerous rank-and-file Republicans opposed it, leadership decided to look for other solutions. Rep. Eric Cantor's (R-VA) primary defeat and imminent departure from leadership gave House Republicans the opportunity to abandon this already unpopular idea. Yesterday, newly chosen Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) indicated that they plan to move in a new direction.

Highway Trust Fund: Long-Term Solvency, Part One: This week, Senators Chris Murphy (D-CT) and Bob Corker (R-TN) floated a plan to increase the nation's fuel tax by twelve cents over two years, and index the tax rate for inflation. This increase would help erase the purchasing power erosion of the gas tax that has occurred since the tax was last

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increased in 1993. The Senators' plan would offset the increased fuel tax by making permanent several currently temporary tax provisions, though no details are available at this time. Legislative language has not yet been released. Click [HERE](#) for Sen. Corker's release, [HERE](#) for Sen. Murphy's release, and [HERE](#) for a one-page summary of the proposal.

Highway Trust Fund: Long-Term Solvency, Part Two: Last week, Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR) introduced an alternative plan to provide long-term increased funding to the HTF. His proposal, *The Repeal and Rebuild Act* (HR 4848), would repeal the federal gas tax and replace it with a wholesale tax on barrels of oil that are processed into gasoline at \$6.75 per barrel (indexed to the National Highway Construction Cost Index and to CAFE standards to account for decreased fuel consumption attributed to the fuel economy standard). The diesel tax would remain in place and be indexed. In addition, Rep. DeFazio's plan would bond the future revenue to make up the looming HTF shortfall. The resulting changes would allow for a \$324 billion six-year authorization, and a near-term reduction in the price that consumers pay in fuel tax (eventually, the indexing will increase what drivers contribute at the pump from current levels, however). Click [HERE](#) for two-page summary of the proposal, and [HERE](#) for a video of DeFazio discussing his proposal.

The Shortfall: In follow-up to testimony given by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) before the Senate Finance Committee in May, CBO provided detailed answers to questions posed by Senators. Senator Michael Bennet (D-CO) asked how the looming shortfall impacts local governments' ability to plan for the future. CBO stated in part, "The possibility of such reductions [in federal funding]—and even larger ones in some years—creates uncertainty that makes program planning difficult for state and local governments and for private contractors, and it adds to the risk that some planned projects will not be started and that work on some ongoing projects might be delayed." Read the rest of the answer to Sen. Bennet's question and all of the questions that were posed to CBO [HERE](#).

REGIONAL BRIEF

MORPC in D.C.: Leaders from the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) recently visited Washington D.C. to promote its regional priorities with Ohio's Congressional delegation and U.S.

Senators. They stressed the importance of increasing the nation's federal gas tax and highlighted a letter that MORPC and business leaders from the Columbus area recently signed. The letter urges Congress to provide a short-term HTF fix and long-term funding stability. Click [HERE](#) for the letter.

OPPORTUNITY BRIEF

Click [HERE](#) to view the list of grants and events still open!

WEBINAR: Transportation Planning Rule

June 24, 12:00 – 2:00 PM ET

This webinar is intended for those who missed the joint Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) / Federal Transit Authority external webinar on June 13th. Be sure to mark your calendar to review regulation content. Click [HERE](#) to register.

WEBINAR: Using FAF Data in Economic Analysis

June 26, 1:00 – 2:15 PM ET – Register by June 24

FHWA will explore how practitioners in state departments of transportation, metropolitan/regional planning organizations, and other agencies can use *Freight Analysis Framework (FAF)* data to support economic analysis, such as cost-benefit studies, freight investment scenarios, and other activities. It will also provide a useful foundation for more advanced topics (e.g., linking FAF with county-level data, using FAF for statewide freight planning) that will be covered in future webinars. This webinar is for practitioners with basic or no knowledge of the FAF, who would like to move to the next skill level. Click [HERE](#) to register.

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