



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

TRANSPORTATION THURSDAYS

CONGRESS BRIEF

House Approves Five-Month Transportation Extension

In advance of MAP-21's expiration at the end of this month, the House passed on July 15 a short-term extension of the nation's transportation program by a vote of **312 to 119**. The *Highway and Transportation Funding Act of 2015, Part II (HR 3038)* extends the existing authorization until December 18. This bill necessitates a transfer of general funds into the Highway Trust Fund, which would otherwise face insolvency later this summer. The \$8.1 billion in funds are offset largely with **changes in tax compliance and miscellaneous fees**, a package introduced by Ways and Means Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI). Despite previous reservations about another short-term extension, the Administration issued a **Statement of Administration Policy** supporting the bill.

Senate Charges Forward on Reauthorization

Meanwhile, in the Senate, the action has taken a different tone. Senate leadership would prefer an extension through the 2016 presidential election. Instead of crafting a traditional extension of that length, the Senate is pursuing a reauthorization package, which can ultimately be scaled in length based on the funding offsets the chamber can find, so most likely two or three years. Earlier this week, the Senate Finance Committee outlined \$88 billion worth of possible offsets that could pay for a reauthorization package, but due to opposition to certain options, the total has shrunk to \$50 billion. The current list includes \$7 billion from selling oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and \$17 billion from reducing the interest rate the Fed pays to member banks.

On Tuesday, NARC expects the Senate to vote to take up a House-passed bill (since this reauthorization must originate in the House) on an unrelated topic that it will strike and rewrite as its long-term reauthorization proposal. The proposal will include:

- The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee's (EPW) six-year bill covering highways, which passed unanimously out of committee;
- The Senate Commerce bill covering highway safety, intermodal freight, and passenger rail, which passed out of committee yesterday on a party-line vote (more details below);
- A Senate Banking bill covering transit (which is not expected to be marked up in committee) inserted in a manager's amendment; and
- The Finance Committee piece to fund the bill.

Though the EPW and Commerce bills were passed as six-year reauthorizations, they will require upwards of \$100 billion in offsets. Since the Senate is considering barely half of that amount, the final form of the Senate bill will have to be shorter in duration. How long is not yet known.

Senate Commerce Committee Approves Transportation Safety Bill

At yesterday's **markup session**, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation narrowly approved a six-year rail and safety reauthorization bill, the

Comprehensive Transportation and Consumer Protection Act (S.1732), on a 13-11 party-line vote. Developed and sponsored by Chairman John Thune (R-SD) and Senators Deb Fischer (R-NE) and Jerry Moran (R-KS), the bill includes key reforms for consumer safety and regulatory relief, including improvement of the accuracy and accountability of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's vehicle safety oversight; increased accountability of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration for the accuracy of its publicized records and rulemakings; and, through the bipartisan *Railroad Reform Enhancement and Efficiency Act*, improvements in rail safety. Several amendments were proposed by Democrats, and nearly all were rejected along party lines. Notable exceptions were Senator Joe Manchin's (D-WV) amendment to allow trucking companies to use hair samples for employee drug testing and Senator Claire McCaskill's (D-MO) amendment to prohibit rental car companies from renting vehicles with recall defects that have not been repaired. A provision to authorize the TIGER discretionary grant program as a freight-only program was stripped in the chairman's mark.

ADMINISTRATION BRIEF

FTA Seeks Nominations for TRACS

FTA is seeking nominations for up to eight two-year seats on the Transit Advisory Committee for Safety (TRACS). Nominees should be representatives from the public transportation safety community with knowledge of rail transit and bus transit safety. Candidates will be evaluated based on leadership skills, the balance of industry representation, and geographic representation. Applications are due August 31.

White House Seeks Nominations; Will Host "Champions of Change" Event to Honor Innovators

The Administration is requesting **nominations** for *Champions of Change for Transportation Technology Solutions* through August 1. The White House Office of Public Engagement and USDOT will then host an event in October to showcase these innovative leaders at the local, regional, and national levels who affect change in four categories: how we move (connectivity, congestion, safety), how we move things (freight efficiency and safety), how we move better (technological advancement and streamlining project delivery), and how we adapt (responding to climate change).

REGIONS BRIEF

Whatcom COG Helps Secure State Funds

The Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) helped Whatcom County secure funding from the State of Washington for five high-priority infrastructure projects in their region. The Washington Legislature earmarked a total of \$88 million for roundabouts, a new on-ramp, an exit interchange restructuring, a short tunnel underpass, and a pedestrian overpass. These projects will help reduce backups and improve traffic flow for travelers in Whatcom County.

Pikes Peak Receives Transportation Planning Excellence Award

FHWA and FTA awarded Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments (PPACG) the Transportation Planning Excellence Award for its *Moving Forward Update 2035* transportation plan. The plan included environmental and public safety features while also setting up avenues for better cooperation among government agencies. The plan was exemplified for being creative and innovative, receiving a variety of funds at both the federal and state levels.

JOBS

View full list of jobs!

Executive Director

East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission, Anniston, AL

Associate Contracts Engineer

San Diego Association of Governments, San Diego, CA

Non Waiver Services Coordinator

OPPORTUNITIES

View full list of grants and events!

Wildlife and Highways: Finding Solutions

July 22, 1:00 – 2:00 PM ET

FHWA's Coordinated Technology Implementation Program will discuss common issues in transportation ecology, how to determine the feasibility of using existing structures for wildlife passages under and around transportation infrastructure, and how to plan infrastructure projects to enhance aquatic and terrestrial passage. The webinar will also address how planners and resource managers can deal with animal/vehicle collisions.

How Road Assessment Programs Address Safety

July 28, 3:00 – 4:30 PM ET

The National Operations Center of Excellence will present an overview of the Road Assessment Program (RAP) and how economic analyses from RAPs are used globally to identify and secure a higher return of investment on efforts to make infrastructure and public transit safer for users. The webinar will explain how traffic engineers can help improve safety by putting RAP risk maps, performance tracking, and investment plans into practice.

Best Practices and Strategies for Assessing Economic Implications of Disinvestment or Right-Sizing Scenarios

August 12, 2:00 – 3:00 PM ET

The Transportation Research Board's Committee on Transportation and Economic Development will review key findings from the National Cooperative Highway Research Program's *Synthesis 480: Economic and Development Implications of Transportation Disinvestment*. The report includes case studies on how state DOTs and MPOs manage their transportation infrastructure network to balance competing maintenance and shrinking investment budgets while mitigating economic consequences.

NARC Conference! Becoming Your Best: Professional Development Training for Executive Directors

August 9-11, Austin, TX

Join NARC and the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) for the 2015 Professional Development Training for Executive Directors conference in Austin, TX. At the first ever Professional Development Training for Executive Directors conference put on by NARC and NADO, you will have the opportunity to network, share best practices, and explore opportunities for strengthening professional capacity and development. You won't want to miss it!

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