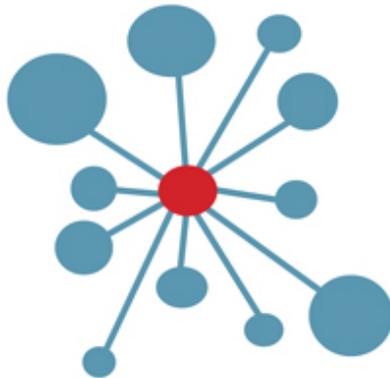




NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

TRANSPORTATION THURSDAYS



**converge ■ learn ■ share**

**2017 executive directors conference  
october 22 - october 24  
san antonio, tx**

**register today!**

**Conference Planning Committee:** NARC and MetroPlan Orlando are forming an Annual Conference Planning Committee and would like your help. If you are interested in shaping the content of the Orlando agenda, please send your name to [anna@narc.org](mailto:anna@narc.org) today!

## CONGRESS BRIEF

### Transportation Appropriations

NARC, along with colleagues at the National League of Cities (NLC) and the National Association of Counties (NACo), held a call yesterday to discuss the current state of the federal appropriations process, which will be a primary focus for Congress when it returns from the August break. A few takeaways regarding transportation:

- The administration proposed steep cuts to overall funding for USDOT and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (THUD), and discretionary funding for USDOT. The House came in above the administration, but below FY17 levels. The Senate provides increases from FY17 levels in its bill.
- The TIGER discretionary grant program received \$500 million in FY17, but was zeroed out in the administration's request. The House also zeroes out the program, but has done so for the past several years as a negotiation point with the Senate. The Senate provides an increase from FY17 levels at \$550 million.
- Capital Investment Grants (CIG, or New Starts) provide full funding grant agreements (FFGAs) for transit capital projects. This program received \$2.4 billion in FY17 but is halved in the administration's budget, which anticipates funding only projects that have current FFGAs and no new projects. The House provides \$1.75 billion, but that number is somewhat skewed. The House has earmarked \$400 million of CIGs funding for the Gateway rail project between New Jersey and New York City, and proposes no funding for new CIG projects. The Senate's \$2.13 billion bill is well above the administration's request and the House bill, but still represents a cut to overall program funding.
- The administration's budget cuts funding for all Amtrak long-distance routes that are not state-supported, cutting Amtrak/passenger rail funding nearly in half – from \$1.5 billion in FY17 to \$800 million in FY18. The House has a smaller cut, providing \$1.4 billion, while the Senate increases funding to \$1.6 billion. The Senate bill also makes state-supported

Amtrak routes in states without nonattainment areas under the *Clean Air Act* eligible for funding under the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) program.

- The Senate bill contains language allowing for the use of unused earmarks, so long as: the state informs the Secretary of Transportation of its intent and submits a quarterly report, the project occurs within 100 miles of the project for which the funding was originally provided, and that less than 10 percent of the earmark has been obligated. Senate language removes the requirement that the earmark be older than 10 years.

### **Debt Ceiling Brouhaha**

When Congress returns to Washington after Labor Day, expect debt ceiling rhetoric to ramp up. According to Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, the debt ceiling must be increased by September 29 or the nation risks defaulting on its debts. The debate will likely focus on whether Congress should pass a “clean” increase, free of spending reductions. Some House Republicans have already indicated a desire to include spending reductions, but there is also wide acknowledgement that Democratic votes will be needed to pass a debt ceiling increase. Democrats generally support a clean measure. The story in the Senate – where eight Democratic votes will be needed to pass a debt increase – is likely to be simple: a clean measure or nothing.

All of this would suggest that the most conservative members of the House – the Freedom Caucus – have little leverage. If their demands for spending cuts are met, it would likely trigger a default on the nation’s debts, which could tank the economy and damage the majority party politically. If their demands are not met, Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) will need Democratic votes to pass a clean debt ceiling increase. That reality, however, hasn’t stopped Freedom Caucus Chairman Mark Meadows (R-NC) from demanding action when Congress returns in September. A stand-off is all but assured.

The debt ceiling deadline comes one day before another deadline: the end of the fiscal year. Congress must either fund the government by September 30 or face a potential shutdown. This is a complicating factor, with so much happening at the same time, but could also be the saving grace, if a broad deal is negotiated to fund the government and increase the debt limit. No matter how it happens, September is bound to be an eventful month in Congress.

## **ADMINISTRATION BRIEF**

### **Top Transportation Posts Remain Unfilled**

As the Senate left town last week, one of its last actions was to approve several dozen of President Trump’s nominees. Of those approved, only a few were USDOT positions. Mark Buzby was confirmed as head of the Maritime Administration, becoming the first and only modal administrator to be confirmed under the Trump Administration (FAA Administrator Michael Huerta was confirmed in 2013 and is serving a five-year term). That leaves five USDOT modal administrations operating without Senate-confirmed administrators. No administrator has even been nominated for FHWA, or FTA. Ronald Batory has been nominated to head the Federal Railroad Administration, but was not confirmed as part of the Senate’s pre-recess package. Derek Kan has been nominated as undersecretary of transportation for policy and Steven Gill Bradbury as general counsel, but were also not confirmed. Other top policy and budget positions remain without nominees.

This lack of confirmed administrators and advisors is another indication that congressional approval of an infrastructure package is an increasingly unlikely scenario this year. Without leaders to run operations on a day-to-day basis and budget and policy folks in place to craft language, little can be accomplished in terms of drafting an overall proposal. Combine that with the must-pass legislation Congress will wrestle with in September, the unfinished health care repeal lingering, and the desire to begin work on a tax reform package, and the tea leaves indicate that infrastructure will have to wait until 2018.

### **Rulemaking Aims to Encourage Private Transit Investments**

The Trump Administration recently released a USDOT rulemaking aimed at attracting private capital to transit projects. The newly proposed Private Investment Project Procedures (PIPP) allows recipients of federal transit funds to identify specific FTA regulations, practices, procedures, or guidance documents that impede the use of public-private partnership or private investment in a project. The proposed rule creates a waiver process in such cases, though it could not be used to waive NEPA requirements. Comments on the proposal are due by September 29.

## **FASTLANE Small Grants**

USDOT has proposed ten FASTLANE Small Project grant awards for FY17, totaling \$79 million. The administration estimates that will result in \$217 million in total infrastructure investment. The authorizing committees of jurisdiction now have a 60-day congressional review period. Seven of the ten proposed grants are targeted for projects in rural areas, which includes freight-related projects to improve roads, rail, ports, and intermodal movements. This will be the last award under the FASTLANE banner; the Trump administration has renamed the program INFRA (Infrastructure for Rebuilding America) for future years. The Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects (NSFHP) program, established in the FAST Act, was designed to provide financial assistance to nationally and regionally significant freight and highway projects. The FAST Act required that 10 percent of each year's grants be reserved for "small projects" under \$100 million. These projects represent the set-aside. The administration has chosen to hold FY17 funding for large projects under the program and award two years' worth of funding in FY18. Find a full description on funded projects [HERE](#).

FY17 Large Projects and FY18 Large and Small Projects under the INFRA program are due by November 2 at 8:00 PM ET. Applications filed under FASTLANE for FY17 will have to resubmit their applications under INFRA, which can be done [HERE](#). See the 'Opportunities' section for a webinar on the INFRA program.

## **JOBS**

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

### **Executive Director**

Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments, Colorado Springs, CO

### **Transportation Planner**

Calaveras Council of Governments, San Andreas, CA

### **RFP: Regional Corridor Analysis**

Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, Columbus, OH

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

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

### **How to Compete for INFRA Grants**

August 14, 2:00 - 4:00 PM ET

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) established the Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects (NSFHP) program to provide federal financial assistance to projects of national or regional significance. USDOT will also refer to NSFHP grants as Infrastructure For Rebuilding America (INFRA) grants. The INFRA program will make approximately \$1.5 billion available to projects that are in line with the administration's principles to help rebuild America's crumbling infrastructure. This is an explanatory webinar on how to apply for INFRA funding and is intended for all applicants.

### **Cycling Equity: Why Do Black and Hispanic Communities Bike Less Often, and How Do We Change it?**

August 15, 1:00 - 2:00 PM ET

Cities across the U.S. are building more and higher-quality bike lane networks, resulting in more riders and increased safety for those taking to two wheels on our cities' streets. However, this increasingly-popular mode for getting around is not equally accessible to all communities. Join Senior Researcher Charles Brown from the National Association of City Transportation Officials for an overview of **his recent study**, focused on understanding and identifying barriers to Black and Hispanic bicycle access and use in New Jersey. Brown's study indicates that while Black and Hispanic communities have a strong interest in bicycling, infrastructure investments such as bike share and dedicated bicycle facilities are more likely to be directed to non-minority neighborhoods and communities.

### **Forecasting Congestion Scenarios using a Travel Time Index**

August 16, 2:00 - 4:00 PM ET

*Pre-registration not required, web room limited to 100 participants*

Tom Williams of Texas A&M Transportation Institute in Austin will describe the results of FHWA's research project, *Guide to Developing Congestion Scenarios for Long Range Plans using Travel Demand Models*. The webinar will describe a major problem faced by long-range travel demand modelers – that the long-range future may be significantly disrupted by social, economic, and technological changes and existing models lack methods to reasonably forecast such futures. Although it is relatively simple to assert changes into existing travel demand model structures – it is difficult to assess the forecasted outcomes of such assertions – such as major reductions to trip tables, changes in trip length or friction factor curves, wholesale shifts in modality or auto occupancy, and land use and urban form changes. A method proposed is the use of baseline calibrated Travel Time Indices on a regional or corridor basis, as a systematic means of putting boundaries on asserted changes to long-range travel demand models. An example of the method will be described using a major metropolitan area trip based model.

### **T3 Webinar: ARC-IT V8: A LIVE Demonstration**

August 17, 1:00 - 2:30 PM ET

The Architecture Reference for Cooperative and Intelligent Transportation (ARC-IT) provides a common framework for planning, defining, and integrating intelligent transportation systems. It is a mature product that reflects the contributions of a broad cross-section of the ITS community. Join USDOT and the Architecture team for a webinar to learn about the integration of the National ITS Architecture, version 7.1 with the Connected Vehicle Reference Implementation Architecture (CVRIA) into one reference architecture. The objective of this webinar is to familiarize attendees with the ARC-IT content so that they apply the architecture. You will learn about ARC-IT, including its background, its components, and its application to regions and projects; and have an opportunity to provide feedback on ARC-IT and its tools through direct feedback with the Architecture team.

### **American Planning Association's Healthy Communities Draft Policy Guide**

Comments due by August 25

APA is developing a new policy guide on planning for healthy communities. A task force, with input from members and partner experts, presented a draft for comment at the 2017 National Planning Conference. A newly revised version is now ready for APA member input. Comments will be accepted through August 25. A Delegate Assembly will convene at the Policy and Advocacy Conference to review and approve a final draft. Comments may be sent to [policyguide@planning.org](mailto:policyguide@planning.org).

### **Southern Transportation and Air Quality Summit 2017**

August 29-30

This FHWA and EPA Regions 4 and 6 event will be held at the North Central Texas Council of Governments office in Arlington, Texas. The Summit's purpose is to bring together stakeholders from the transportation and air quality communities to discuss the current and coming regulatory environment, technologies, and current practices vital to the field of air quality and transportation. The summit is geared to practitioners involved with public agencies at all levels. A host of speakers from within the southern and eastern regions will present key topics, best practices and latest information vital to transportation, planning and air quality professionals. The registration fee is \$75.00 per person. During the evening of the first conference day, enjoy an optional dinner with tours of Globe Life Park (Texas Rangers) and AT&T Stadium (Dallas Cowboys).

### **Guide for Conducting Benefit-Cost Analyses of Multimodal, Multijurisdictional Freight Corridor Investments**

September 7, 2:00 - 3:00 PM ET

The Transportation Research Board will conduct a free webinar that features research from the National Cooperative Freight Research Program (NCFRP)'s Report 38: *Guide for Conducting Benefit-Cost Analyses of Multimodal, Multijurisdictional Freight Corridor Investments*. This webinar will discuss how to conduct benefit-cost analyses of proposed infrastructure investments on multimodal, multi-jurisdictional freight corridors. Presenters will illustrate how the guidebook may help decision makers and other stakeholders at local, state, regional, and national levels. They will also provide an overview of the guidebook and how to use it.

## **Transforming Transportation Kicks Off with Deputy Transportation Secretary Rosen**

September 15, 12:00 - 1:00 PM ET

USDOT Volpe Center's upcoming speaker series—The Ongoing Transformation of the Global Transportation System—will kick-off with USDOT Secretary Jeffrey A. Rosen. Transforming Transportation continues USDOT Volpe Center's long history of convening thought leaders, decision makers, and stakeholders from across the global transportation enterprise to anticipate future transportation issues, generate fresh approaches to emerging issues, anticipate transportation trends, and inform decision making.

## **CONTACT US**

*Copyright © 2017 National Association of Regional Councils, All rights reserved.*