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## NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

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# eRegions

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### **EXECUTIVE BRIEF**

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## **EXECUTIVE BRIEF**

Today is my first day as Executive Director of the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC), the leading advocacy organization advancing the goals of regional organizations before Congress and the Administration in Washington, DC. I am thrilled to be here!

It's an honor to be in this position, as I truly believe that Regional Councils (RCs) are central to our nation's efforts to respond intelligently to the challenges and opportunities that all of you face in your communities.

Together, we will build on NARC's success - strengthening the role of

**Anna Rosenbaum**

Communications Associate

**Erich W. Zimmermann**

Director of Transportation

Programs

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RCs in federal programs and legislation, providing networking opportunities and best practices, and offering expert research and analysis of issues and trends that affect your work.

I am looking forward to partnering with all of you to enhance NARC's mission as we move through this transition. Some of my ideas include working with NARC's top-notch staff to:

- Focus on member relations by communicating effectively with you, our existing members;
- Build NARC's membership by fostering new relationships with prospective members;
- Create a culture of collaboration that will strengthen the voice of RCs in Washington DC by working with other associations and organizations that work to support local governments;
- Seek additional private sector partners who share NARC's vision for regional excellence and can boost the organization's financial success; and
- Leverage our excellent relationships with Members of Congress and their staff, Administration officials, state and local elected and appointed officials to build strategic partnerships to support regional collaboration and underscore the role that RCs must play in planning for the future of our nation.

I know that all of you have ideas as well, so please call or email me! I am looking forward to having a robust discussion about how NARC can improve its services for you.

I am looking forward to seeing all of you at the NARC Annual Conference this coming June as we begin our journey together.

Sincerely,  
Joanna Turner

My contact information at NARC is:

joanna@narc.org

Office: 202.986.1032 x216

Direct Dial: 202.618.5689

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**PROGRAMUPDATE**

**EPA Shares Tips on Climate Change for Earth Day:** Earth day is April 22nd, but the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is celebrating all month by sharing a new tip each day to help you act on climate change. Check out all the tips [HERE](#).

**Does Your Region Have a School That's Gone Solar?** Our friends at The Solar Foundation (TSF) want to hear from you! TSF is working on the *National Solar Schools Census* to build a comprehensive database of K-12 solar schools, understand the challenges schools face in going solar, and learn how solar has been used in these schools as a teaching tool. If you have any example you'd like to share, please click [HERE](#).

**April is National County Government Month:** Each April celebrates the National County Government Month to raise public awareness and understanding about the roles and responsibilities of county government. This year's theme is – *Ready and Resilient Counties: Prepare. Respond. Thrive*. Click [HERE](#) for more information.

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## POLICYUPDATE

*Congress is in session.*

**Appropriations Update:** The Appropriations Committees continue to hold hearings with agency officials on FY15 spending bills. Some bills, but not those most important to regional planning organizations, have started the markup process.

**House Committee Passes Budget:** Last week, the U.S. House of Representatives Budget Committee adopted Chairman Ryan's (R-WI) FY15 budget resolution, a non-binding blueprint. The House will take up the proposal next week. The measure leaves intact the \$1.014 trillion discretionary spending cap agreed to in December's budget deal, but includes changes to entitlement programs. The proposal would also increase the current defense spending cap by \$482 billion and save a total of \$857 billion over ten years, leading to a small budget surplus. The Senate is not expected to consider a budget resolution this year.

**Senate Finance Committee to Markup Tax Extenders Bill:** Last week, Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) released a bill that will extend a long set of expired and soon-to-expire tax breaks for another year. Last

week, the U.S. Senate Finance Committee began markup on the bill, *Expiring Provisions Improvement Reform and Efficiency Act* (EXPIRE). Only two of the tax breaks have a direct transportation connection. One provides parity between employer-provided mass transit and parking benefits. According to the Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT) analysis: "The bill would extend through 2015 the increase in the monthly exclusion for employer-provided transit and vanpool benefits from \$130 to \$250, so that it would be the same as the exclusion for employer-provided parking benefits." Another provision provides a credit for businesses for railroad track maintenance. "The bill extends for two years, through 2015, the railroad maintenance credit that provides Class II and Class III railroads (generally, short-line and regional railroads) with a tax credit equal to 50 percent of gross expenditures for maintaining railroad tracks that they own or lease." The JCT analysis of the bill can be found [HERE](#).

**Senate to Hold Vote on Unemployment Benefits:** Today, the Senate will vote on a bill to extend emergency unemployment benefits that were allowed to expire last December. In a bipartisan effort, the Senate is expected to pass the bill which would restore insurance to the long-term unemployed for five months. However, even if the Senate is successful in passing the measure, U.S. House of Representatives Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) is signaling that the House will not consider it by saying, "It doesn't create any jobs, and right now we are in the business of trying to see how we can get people back to work, for an America that works for more people." This language is consistent with what House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) has been indicating. Speaker Boehner previously stated that he will not bring the bill to the floor unless it contains a job-creation provision. The Senate is expected to continue to pressure the House to bring the bill to the floor for a clean up or down vote.

**Senate Committee Reauthorizes EPA's Brownfields Program:** In an effort to increase safety, attract new businesses to communities across the country, and revitalize communities with contaminated waste sites, the U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee approved the *Brownfields Utilization, Investment, and Local Development* (BUILD) Act of 2013 (S. 491) on April 3. The legislation supports cleanups and site assessments of contaminated sites and provides technical assistance to rural and disadvantaged communities to help with cleanup efforts. The bill increases the limit for site remediation grants from the current \$200,000 to \$500,000 per site, and

gives the U.S. EPA Administrator discretion to raise the limit further, to \$650,000. Chairman Barbara Boxer (D-CA) applauded the bipartisan committee vote, saying “I look forward to working with my colleagues as we move forward with this legislation in the full Senate.”

**U.S. DOT Issues Rearview Camera Rule:** The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) recently issued a rule that will require new cars and light trucks to have backup cameras to help prevent accidents in which drivers accidentally back over pedestrians, killing hundreds annually. Automakers will be required to install rearview cameras or similar technology in all new vehicles weighing less than 10,000 pounds beginning in May 2018. The new rule mandates that a 10-foot-by-20-foot zone directly behind the vehicle be visible to the driver. The system must also meet other requirements including image size, linger time, response time, and durability. A 2008 law passed by Congress was named after Cameron Gulbransen, a toddler backed over and killed at age 2. The law directed U.S. DOT to issue a rear visibility standard by 2011. The Administration delayed the deadline numerous times, but finally issued the new rule last week.

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## REGIONS360

**FRCA Unveils New Economic Scorecard Website Utilizing Six Pillars Metrics:** Florida’s Regional Planning Councils received a new suite of economic development tools recently, as the Florida Regional Councils Association (FRCA) launched a new website on regional metrics. Each of Florida’s eleven regional planning councils will now be able to compare statistics ranging from high school graduation rates and trade imports to employment by industry and relative housing prices. “This new website enables Florida’s Regional Planning Councils—as federally designated Economic Development Districts—to see our Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies in action,” said Brian Teeple, Chair of FRCA Executive Directors Advisory Committee. Click [HERE](#) to read the full article.

**TMACOG Recognized for Excellence:** The Eastern Maumee Bay Chamber of Commerce recognized Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments (TMACOG) with their Prism Award for General Excellence at the annual banquet and awards ceremony held March 27. The chamber represents governments and businesses east of the Maumee River in an area including East Toledo, the cities of Oregon and Northwood, the village of Genoa, and Lake Township. The

General Excellence Award is granted to a business or organization of any size based on excellent performance. Criteria for the award include service to the businesses and communities of the Eastern Maumee Bay region, civic and community involvement, and creating business opportunities.

**H-GAC Releases *Instant Impact Guide*:** Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC), in partnership with Better Houston, has published *Instant Impact Guide: Simple, Cost-Effective Ideas for More Vibrant, Pedestrian-Friendly Streets*. The *Instant Impact Guide* incorporates ideas that are relatively quick to implement and can help build momentum for improving your community's pedestrian, bicycling, and economic revitalization goals. Many projects outlined in the guide can also serve as test cases for potential projects before they are implemented permanently. The guide is available [HERE](#).

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## GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

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

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

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

### **FEMA to Host Virtual Meetings on National Flood Insurance PEIS**

*April 22, 2:00 – 4:00 PM ET*

*May 13, 4:00 – 6:00 PM ET*

*May 20, 4:00 – 6:00 PM ET*

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is holding three webinars to provide information and take public comments on the NFIP (National Flood Insurance Program) Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS). Because changes to the NFIP are a major federal action, FEMA is undertaking the preparation of a PEIS. The NFIP consists of three primary elements: mapping, floodplain management, and insurance. The modifications included in the Impact Statement may cover some or all of these elements. Scoping efforts have been ongoing and FEMA is currently soliciting feedback from the public. Click [HERE](#) for more information and webinar registration.

### **CONFERENCE: NARC's 48th Annual Conference and Exhibition**

*June 6-11, Louisville, KY*

The Annual Conference and Exhibition is the largest national event focused on promoting effective regional cooperation and solutions through interaction and education. Held annually in June, NARC's Annual Conference is the premier place to learn how to engage in effective regional collaboration. Additional information will be available in early 2014. Click [HERE](#) for more information.

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Our mailing address is:  
National Association of Regional Councils  
777 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 305  
Washington, DC 20002

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