

November 9, 2015 [View this email in your browser](#)



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

eREGIONS

NEWS FROM WASHINGTON

The Senate is in session and the House will return next week.

This Week

The Senate will be in session this week and will take up the first spending bill of the year – funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs – and vote on the defense authorization bill, S. 1356. The House is not in session this week and will return Monday, November 16.

Last week, both the House and Senate released their schedule for 2016:

- [House Calendar](#)
- [Senate Calendar](#)

Both the House and Senate will be in session the week of February 7, during the National Conference of Regions in Washington, D.C.

House Approves Transportation Reauthorization Legislation

Last week, the House voted **363 to 64** to approve a six-year transportation reauthorization bill, the Surface Transportation Reauthorization and Reform (STRR) Act (H.R. 3763). This vote came after two marathon days of debate regarding amendments to the legislation. The STRR Act would provide \$325 billion in new contract authority for the nation's infrastructure, renew the controversial Export-Import Bank, and make it a real possibility that a long-term transportation bill could reach the president's desk.

Please join NARC for an update on the legislation tomorrow, **Tuesday, November 10 from 3:30 PM to 4:00 PM ET**. **Use this link** to provide your name and email address. You will receive a follow-up email with the call details. Please contact Erich Zimmerman at erich@narc.org with any questions.

The bill:

- Contains six years of policy reform, *but only three years of funding*. But wait! An **amendment approved on the House Floor from Rep. Randy Neugebauer** (R-TX) – which replaces two of the Senate's more controversial offsets with a provision that makes funds currently contained in "surplus funds" of Federal Reserve Banks available to the HTF – seems to solve the problem of only three years of funding. Early indications are that this amendment will provide significantly higher funding than contained in the base bill.
- Provides a modest increase in the Surface Transportation Program's funding level and increases the portion of the program suballocated by population from the current 50% to 55% by FY 2020. This will provide nearly \$5.0 billion in additional funding for local

priorities compared to existing funding levels.

- Preserves the Transportation Alternatives Program, though it makes it a set-aside under STP. The new TAP would be funded at a flat \$819 million annually in each of the bill's six years. This funding level is slightly below the Senate's \$825 million annual level. The Senate bill also suballocates 100% of the program, but the House leaves it at 50% suballocated.
- Increases funding for metropolitan planning by more than \$120 million over the life of the STRR Act.
- Makes on-system bridges that are not on the National Highway System (half of which are owned by counties and cities) eligible for funding under the National Highway Performance Program. This is a vast improvement from the Senate's DRIVE Act reauthorization bill, which funds these bridges (along with off-system bridges) by taking 15% off the top of STP.
- Increases funding for urban and rural public transportation, including a new competitive grant program under the Bus and Bus Facilities Program.
- Contains the same provision as the Senate's DRIVE Act to fix the MAP-21 requirement that transit receive a voting position on the boards of MPOs that represent TMAs. This new provision clarifies that no changes in state law or enabling agreements are required, and explicitly allows an elected official to serve as the designated "transit representative" on the MPO board. These are changes NARC sought from lawmakers in both the Senate and the House. The fact both bills contain this provision dramatically increases the probability that it will be in the final agreement.

Up next is a conference process between the House and Senate to resolve differences between the two versions. The funding for the program will remain a sticking point. Lawmakers on both sides of Capitol Hill are optimistic that they can complete a bill before November 20, 2015 (the expiration of the current extension of the program). This constrained timeline is more difficult due to a House recess next week, but there is no doubt that the possibility of a long-term bill on the president's desk sometime this year has increased tremendously, and now appears to be the most likely outcome. This is a watershed change from where we were just three months ago, when it seemed the prospects for a bill were approximately zero. The text of the bill is [here](#) (although the text does not include the many amendments that were accepted, most were minor).

Budget Negotiations Ahead

Although Congress and the President have agreed to a budget outline for 2015, H.R. 1314, attention now turns to funding the government past December 11. Lawmakers now must reach agreement on the next funding decisions. Options include a fiscal year 2016 omnibus, a "cromnibus," or year-long Continuing Resolution. The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 raises the debt ceiling through March 15, 2017 and adds an additional \$50 billion in spending for FY 2016, split evenly between defense and discretionary funding.

Waters of the U.S. Update

House Republicans are looking for another opportunity to stop the implementation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) ruling on Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) after losing a vote in the Senate last week. Lawmakers are considering including the WOTUS ban on two fiscal year 2016 appropriations bills since the provision covers the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and EPA. Earlier this year, NARC joined NLC and NACo in opposition to the WOTUS ruling in a letter found [here](#).

House Chairman Proposes Overhaul of Conservation Fund

The Chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee has offered a legislative proposal to make changes in the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), administered by the Department of the Interior, which expired on September 30 and has stalled due to disagreement over the structure of the 50-year-old program. The Fund has operated since 1965 to protect national parks and water resources and make them publicly accessible.

The legislative fix offered by Chairman Rob Bishop (R-UT) would reauthorize the fund for seven years at its current level of up to \$900 million, but change the allocation of funds by directing more

funds to oil and gas drilling. The proposal would spend a minimum of 45% on state programs and 20% on permitting of off-shore oil and gas drilling which subsidizes the conservation program. The bill would create Outer Continental Shelf Pilot Offices to streamline permitting for off-shore oil and gas exploration. A Senate Committee approved a package of energy bills earlier this fall including the LWCF. S. 2102, but the full Senate has not acted yet.

OTHER NEWS

Update on U.S. Census Bureau's 2020 Census Operational Plan

Recently, the U.S. Census Bureau provided an update on the 2020 Census Operational Plan for the Census Project. As the initial version of an emerging concept of operations, the 2020 Census Operational Plan reflects and supports evidence-based decision-making by describing design concepts and their rationale, identifying decisions still to be made, and describing significant issues and risks related to the implementation of the Census Project.

DOT and Centers for Disease Control Collaborate on Health Impact of Transportation Systems Tool

The **Transportation and Health Tool** (THT) was developed by the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to provide easy access to data examining the health impacts of transportation systems. The tool provides data on a set of transportation and public health indicators for each U.S. state and metropolitan area that describe how the transportation environment affects safety, active transportation, air quality, and connectivity to destinations.

NIST Releases Community Resilience Planning Guide

To help U.S. communities better withstand and rebound from the shocks of severe weather, earthquakes, and other hazards, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) has just issued the **Community Resilience Planning Guide for Buildings and Infrastructure Systems**. The guide lays out a practical six-step process that communities can follow to develop resilience plans to help them prepare for hazards, adapt to changing conditions, and withstand and rapidly recover from disruptions.

FEATURED JOBS

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Regional Transportation Demand Management Planner

San Diego Association of Governments, San Diego, CA

Transportation Modeling Data Analyst

Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission, Pittsburgh, PA

FUNDING

[View full list of grants!](#)

EVENTS

[View full list of events!](#)

Transportation Reauthorization Update

Tuesday November 10, 3:30-4:00 PM ET

Please join us for a call tomorrow on the current status of the effort to reauthorize the nation's transportation programs. The call will take place tomorrow from **3:30 to 4:00 PM ET** and may go slightly longer depending on the volume of questions. **Use this link** to provide your name and email address. You will receive a follow-up email with the call details.

2016 National Conference of Regions

February 7-9, 2016* – Washington, DC

The National Conference of Regions is NARC's forum to determine key policy issues and a legislative agenda for the year ahead, targeting topics central to our members' missions and their local elected officials' focus. Additional information will be available later this year. **Note: Capitol Hill Day is February 10. Please make room in your travel plans to meet with your representatives.*

Host NARC's Annual Conference in 2017!

NARC seeks regions to host our Annual Conference in 2017, 2018, 2019, and beyond. Host regions are asked to partner with NARC staff on agenda development, mobile workshops, and fundraising for the conference. This is an excellent opportunity to highlight your regional successes before a national audience! Please fill out our ***Host Region Worksheet*** and submit it to Leslie Wollack (**leslie@narc.org**) for further consideration. Help us fill our calendar and celebrate your region!

CONTACT US

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