



**REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

*Metropolitan Planning • Public Transportation & Operations • Engineering & Construction*

Metropolitan Planning Organization of Washoe County, Nevada

September 18, 2020

**AGENDA ITEM 6.2**

**TO:** Regional Transportation Commission

**FROM:** Bill Thomas, AICP *BT*  
Executive Director

**SUBJECT:** Federal Report

Monthly update/messages from RTC Executive Director Bill Thomas – *no action will be taken on this item.*

**Federal Update for RTC of Washoe County**  
**Prepared by Cardinal Infrastructure and Thompson Coburn**  
**September 18, 2020 Board Meeting**

**Appropriations**

On July 31<sup>st</sup>, the House passed their version of the FY 2021 transportation appropriations bill. The transportation appropriations measure totals \$107.2 billion in total budgetary resources for U.S. DOT, an increase of \$21.1 billion above FY 2020 and \$19.4 billion above the President's budget request. On July 30<sup>th</sup>, the White House issued a veto threat to the House appropriations bill in its statement of administration policy (SAP). While the SAP makes note of the appropriations package exceeding Congress' two-year budget agreement spending limits, it specifically notes objections to the transportation appropriations bill, specifically opposing \$26 billion in DOT emergency spending and the mask mandate applicable to airlines, certain public transit, and Amtrak. The Senate has not taken up the measure.

The end of the federal fiscal year is September 30<sup>th</sup>. If a continuing resolution (CR) is not passed before then, the government will shutdown. House Democratic majority leadership, Senate Republican majority leadership, and the White House have all stated they do not want to shutdown the government and that a continuing resolution must be passed. House Speaker Pelosi and Secretary Mnuchin have agreed in principle to a clean CR but at this point its length is not determined. The ease of passage of a CR depends upon what other legislation is included in the vote to keep the government funded, including but not limited to, COVID-19 relief legislation, FAST Act surface transportation reauthorization (which also expires September 30<sup>th</sup>), and National Flood Insurance Program reauthorization.

**COVID-19 Relief Package**

On July 27<sup>th</sup>, Senate Republican leadership released several pieces of legislation that take the form the Health, Economic Assistance, Liability Protection, and Schools (HEALS) Act. The HEALS Act does not include funding for public transit agencies, or supplemental funding for state and local governments. APTA is advocating for the inclusion of \$32-36 billion in transit funding. The total price tag of the HEALS Act is in the \$1 trillion range.

The House-passed Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act includes \$15.75 billion in operating assistance grants for public transit. For state and local funding, the bill provides \$500 billion to states and \$375 billion to local governments, and \$15 billion to state DOTs. The total price tag of the HEROES bill is in the \$3 trillion range.

On August 18<sup>th</sup>, Senate Republicans released a "skinny" COVID-19 relief bill, the "Delivering Immediate Relief to America's Families, Schools and Small Businesses Act." This bill was slightly amended and re-introduced on September 8<sup>th</sup>. Among other provisions, the bill includes liability limitations for COVID-19 personal injury claims, funding for the Educations Stabilization Fund , federally funded supplemental unemployment benefits, a second round of Paycheck Protection Program funding with reforms on new applications and existing loans, assistance for child care providers, extends the deadline for Coronavirus Relief Funds, and additional appropriations for testing, contact tracing, and vaccine development. This bill is in the \$500 billion range and may be acted on by the Senate this week.

The "skinny" proposal does not fix the core issue between the House and Senate - the size of the relief package. In fact, it goes in the opposite direction. The House and Senate remain far apart, both in scope and overall funding, and negotiations have stalled. The timeline for passage of a relief package remains incredibly fluid. With political pressure mounting and layoffs threatened, it is anyone's guess as to what Speaker Pelosi and Leader McConnell will be able to agree to, if anything.

### **FTA Grant Application**

RTC submitted its grant application for the FTA's Real-Time Transit Infrastructure and Rolling Stock Condition Assessment grant program. The project, Digital Twin Paradigm for Real-Time Transit Infrastructure Maintenance, received a letter of support from Senator Cortez Masto, Senator Rosen, and Congressman Amodei. RTC's project will place sensors and network equipment on buses, rather than fixed infrastructure; in so doing, each time a bus drives past a piece of transit infrastructure, sensors on the bus will update the infrastructure's digital twin, using state-of-the-art machine learning technology to automatically identify any changes and sending notifications of maintenance needs in real time.

### **U.S. Conference of Mayors**

The U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM) released its "American Breakthrough" platform of 10 priorities "inspired by the Conference's bipartisan focus on creating a safe, sustainable, and equitable future through investing in America's communities." One of these priorities is: "Build Modern, Resilient Infrastructure to Address Climate Change, Promote Environmental Justice, and Enhance Opportunity and Productivity: Transportation, Water, Green Energy, and Technology Systems." Within this priority, USCM proposes:

- Secure the highway trust fund and direct more highway dollars through the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program and other programs.
- Make public transit investment a higher priority and reward cities that embrace new initiatives and innovations...including local hiring...and support local efforts to complete streets and advance safety first outcomes, improve transit access and services, promote transit adjacent housing, reduce air pollutants...and harden existing transportation facilities and networks to make them more resilient to climatic events.
- Support continuing local efforts to address future transportation needs...incentivize the local deployment of new transportation technologies and update local regulatory regimes to address autonomous vehicles...and embrace shared mobility services and resources that expand travel options in cities and their regions and increase the throughput of urban networks serving people and vehicles.
- Support local efforts to pilot and test new technologies, especially in the transportation sector.

### **Presidential Memorandum**

On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, President Trump signed a memorandum to the Attorney General and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), entitled, "Reviewing Funding to State and Local Government Recipients of Federal Funds that are Permitting Anarchy, Violence, and Destruction in American Cities." The memo includes reference to Washington, DC, Portland, New York, and Seattle. The memo instructs Attorney General Barr to develop and publish a list of "anarchist jurisdictions" that "permitted violence and the destruction of property to persist and have refused to undertake reasonable measures to counteract these criminal activities." OMB is directed to issue guidance on restricting or disfavoring the eligibility of anarchist jurisdictions to receive Federal grants.

### **Select Committee on the Climate Crisis**

The Senate Democrats' Select Committee on the Climate Crisis, of which Senator Cortez Masto is a member, released its framework for comprehensive legislation to address climate change. The overarching goals of the framework are to achieve 100% net-zero emissions by 2050, increase federal spending on climate action to at least 2% of GDP, and create at least ten million new green jobs. The report provides, "Rapid increases in zero-emission vehicles, cleaner liquid fuels, public transportation, and smarter planning can significantly reduce emissions from the transportation sector."

### **Census**

The U.S. Conference of Mayors have sent letters to Congress and the Administration concerning the U.S. Census. One letter urges congressional leaders to include language in the next COVID-19 relief package to officially extend the statutory and data collection deadlines. A second letter urges the Census Bureau to stand by its April decision to extend the data collection deadline through October 31, 2020.

Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal (D-WA), co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, led a letter to leadership (signed by Congresswoman Titus and 87 other Members of Congress), urging them to prohibit the shortened collection deadline. Furthermore, following a request by the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Science, and Justice Ranking Member Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), the U.S. Department of Commerce Inspector General notified Commerce Secretary Ross that they will investigate the decision to shorten 2020 Census field data collection and self-response operations.

It has been reported that, after October 7<sup>th</sup>, the Census Bureau will stop accepting paper census forms postmarked by September 30<sup>th</sup>. There are concerns as to whether existing delays in USPS operations could negatively impact accuracy of these mail-in forms, especially in more rural areas.