



Surface Transportation Reauthorization Update

On Nov. 5, the U.S. House of Representatives approved the [Surface Transportation Reform and Reauthorization \(STRR\) Act of 2015](#), a six-year authorization for federal surface transportation programs, which authorizes \$261 billion to highway programs and \$74 billion to transit. Overall, it would authorize about \$30 billion less than the [Senate's DRIVE Act](#), which passed earlier this year. However, the STRR Act also contains additional offsets to further cover the cost of the bill including a provision that would transfer funds from the Federal Reserve's Surplus Fund in the Highway Trust Fund (HTF), which could provide the HTF with \$40 billion over 10 years. Currently, the HTF has an [annual deficit of approximately \\$15 billion](#), and is forecasted to grow to over \$20 billion in the next decade. Following action in the House, Congress has approved two short-term extensions, with the latest lasting until Dec. 4, to provide the House-Senate conference committee additional time to approve a conference report.



should institute a requirement that drones weighing between 250 grams and 55 pounds and operating in the National Air Space be required to electronically register, at no cost. Registration will include providing an owner's name and street address to the FAA, and additional information such as the drone's serial number and owner's email address may be optional. A draft rule based on the recommendations has been submitted to Foxx and Huerta for their review. Although no formal timetable for the rule's release has been announced,

Foxx has previously noted his desire to finalize a rule before the end of the year. For further details on the recommendations, [click here](#).

11/19/2015—Work was suspended on the Senate's FY 2016 transportation appropriations measure when Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) noted that he would not offer unanimous consent to move the bill to a final vote after his amendment on the Syrian refugee issue was not ruled in

order. The rules of the Senate would have required significant time in order to move forward without such consent. Prior to this, the Senate had adopted an amendment from Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) to strike a provision which would have given states the ability to allow for the operation of tractor trailers that exceed federal limits. Congress has until Dec. 11 to approve an FY 2016 spending bill or pass another continuing resolution.

Top Stories

11/23/2015 —The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) [released](#) a set of recommendations by the Unmanned Aircraft Systems Registration Task Force that was [established last month](#) at the direction of U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Secretary Anthony Foxx and FAA Administrator Michael Huerta. The task force's main recommendation notes that FAA

11/12/2015—IHS Global Insight [forecast](#) that North American rail carloads will end 2015 with the lowest growth rate since 2009, and total volumes dropping to its lowest level since 2010. However, North American carload volumes are expected to return to strong growth of 3.6 percent in 2017, after the decline

in coal shipments is taken into account and growth in the appreciation of the dollar subsidies.

From the Department of Transportation (DOT)

11/23/2015—The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) [announced](#) 2014 saw a further decline in motor vehicle crash fatalities of 0.1 percent compared to 2013. However, NHTSA also noted that early estimates for 2015 showed that the current fatality rate is 8.1 percent above the same period in 2014. The increase, NHTSA noted, may be due to job growth and low fuel prices that have given rise to increased driving as well as increased leisure driving and driving by young people.

11/13/2015—DOT released the 2015 edition of [State Transportation Statistics](#), which includes a series of reports highlighting major federal databases and other national sources related to each state's infrastructure, safety, freight movement and passenger travel; vehicles, economy and finance; and energy and the environment.

11/10/2015—The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) [released](#) a report on the future of the Northeast Corridor, between Washington, D.C. and Boston, Mass. The report outlined three different investment levels or "options" and how those would impact the future of travel along the rail system. The three options would provide \$65 billion, \$135 billion or \$290 billion, and are categorized as investments that would maintain, grow or transform the NEC. As a follow up to the report, the FRA [will hold public hearings](#) over the next two months.

11/3/2015—NHTSA [issued](#) a record civil penalty of \$70 million, with an additional \$130 million if future conditions are not met, against the Takata Corporation for their role in the production, manufacturing and distribution of faulty air bag inflators. Additionally, NHTSA is requiring the company to phase out the manufacture and sale of inflators that use phase-stabilized ammonium nitrate propellant. NHTSA launched a formal

enforcement investigation in June 2014 and upgraded it in January 2015. The U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan has said the office has an open criminal inquiry into the matter.

10/28/2015—Secretary Foxx [announced](#) that the Department will provide \$500 million from its TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) 2015 program for 39 transportation projects in 34 states, with several projects spanning multiple states. A full list of all the awards can be found [here](#). Overall, DOT received 627 eligible applications from 50 states and several U.S. territories, including tribal governments, requesting more than \$10 billion. Additionally, 43 percent of the projects selected will take place in rural areas.

Other News Items

10/27/2015—The Librarian of Congress (LOC) [announced](#) that it would not constitute a violation of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DCMA) for researchers to investigate and modify an automobile's software system for the purpose of security research, maintenance or repair. The exemption goes into effect in 2016 and will only last for three years before the LOC must begin its next triennial review.

NCSL Resources

Registration is still open for [NCSL's Capitol Forum](#), taking place in Washington D.C. Dec. 8-11, complete with our annual Lobby Day and professional development for legislative staff.