



Top Stories

Update on Surface Transportation Reauthorization:

On June 24, the Senate Environmental and Public Works (EPW) Committee [unanimously](#) approved the DRIVE Act, a six-year, \$277 billion federal transportation reauthorization, a \$32 billion funding increase from 2015 levels. Of particular interest, NCSL supported language creating a new funding program for states to find alternatives to the gas tax was included in the bill. See [NCSL's policy resolution](#). The bill also includes measures

to further speed up the environmental permitting process; a 30 percent reduction in funding for the TIFIA program; and a reduction in state funds under the National Highway Performance Program. For a detailed breakdown of the funding levels and authorizations contained within the bill please [click here](#).

Although the committee's passage of a six-year bill is a positive step toward final approval by Congress of a long-term plan, there remain a number of other key steps. Most important is the funding title of the bill that falls under the jurisdiction of the Senate Finance and House Ways and Means Committees. Neither committee has proposed a solution that would provide the level of funding authorized in the Senate EPW bill. The need for congressional action is further highlighted by the fact that both authorization and funding for federal transportation programs are scheduled to expire at the end of July. For additional details or questions regarding the latest on federal transportation news, please contact [NCSL staff](#).



6/19/2015—The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration [jointly proposed](#) phase 2 standards for medium- and heavy-duty vehicles that aim to improve fuel efficiency and reduce carbon pollution. According to EPA, the transportation sector is the second largest contributor of carbon emissions. Within this sector, medium- and heavy-duty trucks emit about 20 percent of the transportation sector's carbon pollution while accounting for just 5 percent of the vehicles on the road. This second stage of standards builds off an initial phase of fuel-efficiency

standards for medium- and heavy-duty vehicles, which launched in 2011 and applies to model years 2014 through 2018.

From the 114th

Congress

6/23/2015—The Senate Commerce Committee [approved](#) a four year reauthorization of Amtrak that would provide a

noticeable boost in federal funds. Specifically, the bill would provide \$1.65 billion annually through fiscal 2019, which is almost 18 percent higher than the \$1.4 billion provided in 2015. The funding levels are above those provided by the House's Amtrak reauthorization, ([H.R. 749](#)), which includes only minor increases through 2019. The bill also includes a number of safety related provisions following last month's deadly Amtrak crash outside of Philadelphia. It remains unclear when the full Senate will take up the bill.

6/23/2015—The Senate Appropriations Committee, as part of its FY 2016 Transportation appropriations bill, [approved](#) funding

for the creation of an interagency center to streamline the environmental permitting process for major projects. The committee report that accompanied the bill noted that preliminary evidence suggested that targeted interagency coordination has shown the ability to speed up project approvals. The House transportation [appropriations bill](#) does not include any similar funding language.

6/17/2015—The U.S. Senate approved a reauthorization ([S. 808](#)) of the Surface Transportation Board, which oversees freight rail operations. The bill would increase the number of board members from three to five as well as provide additional tools to help settle disputes between freight railroads and shippers more quickly, which was a significant issue for many shippers in the Midwest during 2014.

6/12/2015—The U.S. House [approved](#) its FY 2016 Transportation appropriations measure that would reduce federal funding by about 5 percent as compared to 2015, although it does include small increases for highway and pipeline safety programs. Amtrak and the Department of Transportation's (DOT) TIGER program would see noticeable cuts in federal funding. Other notable provisions would increase federal regulations on the maximum length of trailers to 33 feet from 28 as well as forbid the DOT secretary from lobbying state legislators on motorcycle safety. In the Senate, the appropriations bill is awaiting action by the full Senate after being [approved](#) by the appropriations committee on June 23. The bill provides nearly level funding compared to 2015 although it likewise contains the provision relating to trailer length.

5/21/2015—The Senate appropriations committee approved its Energy-Water FY 2016 measure that includes funding levels of \$5.5 billion for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, \$768 million above the administration's request. Additionally the bill contains \$1.25 billion in funding for the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, 12 percent above FY 2015 levels.

From the Department of Transportation (DOT)

6/17/2015—The Federal Transit Authority (FTA) [reported](#) that an inspection of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) rail and bus systems identified organizational deficiencies and operational concerns that significantly limit WMATA's ability to recognize and resolve safety issues.

6/3/2015—DOT Secretary Anthony Foxx [announced](#) that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) finalized its rule requiring electronic stability control systems on heavy trucks and large buses. NHTSA estimates the new rule will prevent as many as 1,759 crashes, 649 injuries and 49 deaths annually.

5/29/2015—The Pipeline Hazardous Materials Safety Association [indefinitely extended](#) an emergency order requiring railway operators to inform state emergency responder's when they'll be carrying large shipments of Bakken crude oil. The extension follows up on a previous order from May 7.

Other News Items

6/23/2015—The Federal Highway Administration [reported](#) that U.S. drivers traveled an estimated 267.9 billion vehicle miles in April, a record high for that month, which resulted in a vehicle miles traveled (VMT) [record of 987.8 billion miles for the first four months of the year](#). The previous record for January through April of any year was 965.5 billion VMT, set in 2007.



[Registration](#) is open for NCSL's 2015 Legislative Summit taking place Aug. 3-5 in Seattle. See [the website](#) for more details and resources from last year. [Click here](#) to find resources from past meetings including session presentations, information, videos and more!