



Top Stories

Update on Surface Transportation Reauthorization:

7/31/2015—The U.S. Congress approved [H.R. 3236](#), an \$8 billion extension of highway and transit programs that provides authorization for federal surface transportation programs until Oct. 29. The bill provides enough funding for the Highway Trust Fund to remain solvent until the end of calendar year 2015. Additionally, the Senate approved the [DRIVE Act](#), a six-year, \$277 billion federal transportation reauthorization bill, that would provide a \$32 billion funding increase compared to maintaining 2015 annual levels. The bill includes a number of policy changes affecting states including unlimited tolling of new interstate land construction, the creation of a national freight program, funding for state pilot projects that explore funding alternatives, additional flexibility in qualifying for highway safety grants and more. Although a positive step towards approval by Congress of a long-term bill, the DRIVE Act only identifies enough pay-fors to provide three years of funding. The House is expected to unveil its version later this year although it remains unclear if Congress will agree on a fully funded multi-year bill by the end of 2015. For [additional details](#) or questions regarding the latest on federal transportation news, please contact [NCSL staff](#). For estimates of each state's allocation from the major surface transportation formula programs, see this [report](#) by FFIS (subscription required).



8/20/2015—The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) [reported](#) that U.S. drivers logged more miles in the first six months of 2015 than any other January through June period. The previous record was set in 2007 prior to the Great Recession. However, per capita vehicle miles travelled (VMT) remains well below its pre-recession levels.

8/12/2015—The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) [reported](#) that sightings of unmanned aircraft or “drones” by commercial aviation pilots have increased significantly in 2015 with over 650 so far, compared to 238 in all of 2014. Following FAA's [release of its proposed rule](#) on drones earlier this year, it remains illegal to operate a drone for commercial purposes without an exemption from FAA, although recreational activity is still allowed within certain limits.

From the 114th Congress

7/15/2015—The Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee [approved](#) the Railroad Reform and Enhancement Efficiency Act, [S. 1626](#), which reauthorizes Amtrak for four years at \$1.65 billion per year as well as addresses issues with the implementation of positive train control and other rail safety issues. Federal authorization for Amtrak is currently set to expire Sept. 30. The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee [approved](#) its reauthorization earlier this year although it is unclear when the two versions will be conferenced together.

7/8/2015—A Senate Finance Committee working group on infrastructure issued a [report](#) noting that a tax on vehicle miles travels (VMT) has the potential to improve the efficiency of highway financing because the tax can be approximated to the costs of road damage and congestion created by vehicles. It also suggested that a nationwide pilot program be undertaken in order to study VMT tax implementation.

7/1/2015—The Wall St. Journal [reported](#) that the House will delay introduction of a bill to reauthorize the FAA until September, at the earliest. The Transportation and Infrastructure Committee had been expected to unveil its version in early July. Authorization for the FAA is currently set to expire on Sept. 30. One issue that the bill is expected to address is the potential for privatizing the nation's air traffic controllers, who are currently FAA employees.

From the Department of Transportation (DOT)

8/14/2015—The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) announced a [proposed rule](#) to establish a Public Transportation Safety Program under FTA's new safety oversight authority established by the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act. The proposed rule would create an overall framework to monitor, oversee and enforce safety in the public transit industry.

7/14/2015—FHWA published a [final rule for national tunnel inspection standards](#), which will be the basis of its first standardized tunnel inspection program. Prior to this rule, FHWA provided only inspection guidance. FHWA reports that it hopes the new program will allow it to compile an inventory of the nation's tunnels and begin to develop a national database similar to the National Bridge Inventory.

6/29/2015—The Department of Energy (DOE) and the Department of Transportation [commissioned](#) a review of available crude oil chemical and physical property data related to the potential for ignition, combustion, and explosion in seeking to better understand and to mitigate risks associated with frequent and large volume rail transport of crude oil in

general and tight oil in particular. A DOE news release noted that the outcome of the review will help form a basis in evaluating whether chemical and physical properties can or should be included as compliance metrics in a crude oil safe transport specification.

Other News Items

8/17/2015—The National Safety Council [reported](#) that traffic deaths are 14 percent higher through the first six months of 2015 than they were during the same period in 2014, and serious injuries are 30 percent higher. The increase, according to the Council, is likely due to an increase in economic activity and the uptick in vehicle miles travelled as compared to previous years.

8/6/2015—The National Transportation Safety Board [released preliminary aviation accident statistics](#) for 2014 showing a slight increase in fatal general aviation accidents, which increased from 222 in 2013 to 253 in 2014. However, the overall number of general aviation accidents decreased slightly from 1,224 in 2013 to 1,221 in 2014.

7/1/2015—Oregon formally [launched OReGO](#), its 5,000 car pilot program to test implantation of a road usage charge. The program will charge 5,000 volunteers 1.5 cents per mile driven. Drivers can choose from a GPS tracker or a simple odometer reading and will be reimbursed for fuel taxes paid at the pump.

NCSL Resources

NCSL successfully completed its 2015 Legislative Summit in Seattle. Find links to session resources, such as PowerPoints, handouts, audio and video recordings [on our website](#). The NRI Committee approved five resolutions (two of which were new) and one policy directive. You can view all our policies [online](#).