



Top Stories

Update on Surface Transportation Reauthorization:

9/17/2015—Congress continues to work behind the scenes on a long-term surface transportation reauthorization. Last week, Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) noted that he is open to shortening the Senate-passed six year reauthorization (DRIVE Act; [H.R. 22](#)) to three years, which would match the \$45 billion in offsets for the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) included in the bill. Authority for federal surface transportation programs is set to expire Oct. 29. On Sept. 25, NCSL sent a [letter](#) to the Senate applauding the creation of a pilot program for states to explore funding alternatives to the fuel tax but also raising concerns about other provisions.



In addition to the surface transportation deadline, the deadline for installation of Positive Train Control (PTC), which tracks train speed and movement, is Dec. 31, and is likely to impact rail negotiations throughout the fall. The U.S. Government Accountability Office also recently released a [report](#) that found a majority of railroad companies will be unable to meet the current deadline, although a vast majority of the companies estimate they will implement PTC within one to five years after the statutory deadline. The Federal Railroad Administration has acknowledged there is no leeway for them to alter the deadline without congressional action.

9/1/62015—U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Secretary Anthony Foxx [wrote](#) that DOT's latest projections about HTF balances show the fund could need additional funding from Congress before the end of the year, potentially as soon as this November. Although balances would not fall to near zero until next summer, the HTF still requires \$4 billion on hand in order to avoid the possibility of reducing reimbursements to states. This follows a Sept. 2 [update](#) from DOT which forecasts that the fund will remain solvent through the third quarter of federal fiscal year 2016. Prior to adjourning for the August recess, Congress approved the transfer of \$8 billion to the HTF; as prior estimates have shown such funding is needed to ensure solvency through the end of calendar year 2015.

From the 114th Congress

9/2/2015—Congressman Reid Ribble (R-Wisc.) introduced a bill that would give states the authority to increase allowable weight limits on interstates from 80,000 pounds to 91,000 pounds, as long as the vehicle has six axles and meets configuration standards. A report released in June by DOT highlighted both positive and negative effects on the transportation network of such a change. On one hand it could result in a 2 to 4 percent reduction in impact on pavement life-cycle costs, but on the other it could require the strengthening or replacement of more than 4,800 bridges at an estimated cost of \$1.1 billion.

From the Department of Transportation (DOT)

9/14/2015—DOT Secretary Anthony Foxx [announced](#) that New York City, Wyoming and Tampa, Fla., will receive up to \$42 million to pilot next-generation technology in infrastructure and in vehicles as part of DOT's Connected Vehicle Pilot Deployment Program. The technology will enable vehicles and infrastructure systems to communicate and share anonymous information with each other and its surroundings in real time.

9/14/2015—The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) [announced](#) that FTA's Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Pilot Program will provide \$19.5 million in grants to support comprehensive planning projects that improve access to public transit in 17 metropolitan areas. A full list of selected projects is available [online](#).

9/9/2015—Senate Commerce Committee Chairman John Thune (R-S.D.), along with Senators Cory Booker (D-N.J.) and Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) sent a [letter](#) to both the DOT secretary and Department of Commerce secretary along with the Federal Communications Commission chairmen on the need to find a common approach to the allocation of spectrum to be used for intelligent transportation systems.

9/3/2015—The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) [designated](#) Marke Gibson and Earl Lawrence for two executive-level positions that will guide the agency's approach to the integration of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) into U.S. airspace. Gibson will become the Senior Advisor on UAS Integration and Lawrence will become the Director of the UAS Integration Office within the FAA's Aviation Safety organization.

9/2/2015—DOT's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) [awarded](#) \$54 million in Pipeline Safety Base grants to 46 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. The grants provide up to 80 percent of operating costs for state pipeline regulators that agree to inspect intrastate pipelines on PHMSA's behalf. Participating states and territories account for 330 inspectors who are responsible for

over 80 percent of the country's intrastate natural gas and hazardous liquid pipeline mileage.

9/1/2015—The FRA [announced](#) that it is soliciting applications for \$10 million in competitive grant funding available to states to improve highway-rail grade crossings and tracks along routes that transport energy products like crude oil and ethanol. The grants are part of the Railroad Safety grants for the Safe Transportation of Energy Products (STEP) by Rail Program.

Other News Items

9/22/2015—The American Road and Transportation Builders Association is [hosting a webinar](#) Oct. 20 on Building Transportation Investment Coalitions. The webinar will explore how building coalitions within states can increase transportation funding. [Register online](#) for free.

9/11/2015—The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) [announced](#) that it was moving forward with its interpretation that model aircraft would not be considered UAS.

9/11/2015—Almost 70 major business and transportation groups, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the American Society of Civil Engineers, sent a [letter](#) to the U.S. House of Representatives urging them to pass a six-year transportation funding bill this year and to "...end this cycle of uncertainty."

NCSL Resources

Registration is now open for [NCSL's Capitol Forum](#), Dec. 8-11 in Washington D.C.

As part of an ongoing project, NCSL would like to know more about your priorities for traffic safety through an [online questionnaire](#). This questionnaire is for state legislators only and takes just a few minutes to complete.

NCSL released its [On Track Report](#) highlighting the many successful state efforts to provide high-quality transit options, with an emphasis on state legislative actions.