



Top Stories

10/27/2014—Amtrak [released](#) overall revenue and ridership levels for Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 which showed ridership growing 0.2 percent to 30.92 million and revenue rising to a record \$2.19 billion, a four percent increase over FY 2013. However, the overall figures mask wide disparity between the Northeast Corridor where ridership grew 3.3 percent to a record 11.6 million passengers while revenue was up 8.2 percent and the struggling long-distance routes which saw a 4.5 percent decline in ridership with a 2.9 percent decline in revenue. State-supported lines, those less than 500 miles, saw little change with ridership falling 0.6 percent while revenue increased 1.8 percent.



10/8/2014—With the spate of rail backlogs that have plagued Midwestern grain shippers continuing, the Surface Transportation Board [ordered](#) all major railroads to file weekly reports on their service performance. The announcement follows an order earlier this year requiring reporting from the BNSF and Canadian Pacific on grain and fertilizer shipments.

9/25/2014—U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Secretary Anthony Foxx [announced](#) that the FAA granted regulatory exemptions to six aerial photo and video production companies, the first step to allowing the film and television industry the use of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) in the National Airspace System. Secretary Anthony Foxx determined that the UAS to be used in the proposed operations do not need an FAA-issued certificate of airworthiness based on a finding they do not pose a threat to national airspace users or

national security. Those findings are permitted under Section 333 of the FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012.

From the 113th Congress

10/8/2014—Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), David Vitter (R-La.) and Al Franken (D-Minn.) wrote a bipartisan [letter](#) to the Surface Transportation Board requesting that it move forward with implementing an initiative known as “competitive shipping.” Such an initiative would allow certain shippers that are only served by one railroad to order that their cargo be switched to another railroad if a workable interchange exists.

From the Administration

10/25/2014—DOT Secretary Foxx unveiled \$100 million in competitive grants to 24 recipients in 19 states to significantly improve bus service and bus facilities in urban and rural communities. The grants are provided through the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) Ladders of Opportunity Initiative, which supports the modernization and expansion of transit bus service across the nation, with the purpose of connecting disadvantaged and low-income populations—including veterans, seniors, and youths—with centers of education, employment, job training, health care, and other vital services. A list of the funded projects can be found [here](#)

10/1/2014—A three-year pilot program that allowed truckers from Mexico to access the U.S. beyond the commercial border zone [officially expired](#), although it remains unclear what the next step for the pilot program will be. A Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) spokesperson noted that the program will have to be evaluated before the agency decides on a next step. However, during the evaluation process, the carriers that participated will be allowed to continue operating in the U.S. The program, which is part of the North American Free Trade Agreement, has drawn the ire of some U.S. truckers and union groups.

From the Department of Transportation (DOT)

10/3/2014—DOT [rejected](#) a request from freight railroad companies' to wind down a May emergency order requiring them to share Bakken Shale crude shipping information with states that they pass through.

10/2/2014—DOT [re-opened the Project of National and Regional Significance \(PNRS\) survey](#) required by the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21). Projects collected in the survey will be compiled in a report to Congress and may be carried out if funds are appropriated. While the program has authorized \$500 million under MAP-21, it has not yet received any appropriations.

From the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

10/24/2014—FAA [awarded](#) \$10.2 million to airports in six states through the Voluntary Airport Low Emission (VALE) program, which allows airport sponsors to use Airport Improvement Program (AIP) funding to purchase equipment that improves air quality.

10/22/2014—The FAA unveiled a plan highlighting how the agency will deliver the benefits of key NextGen initiatives over the next three years. The agreement culminates several months of collaboration between the agency and the NextGen

Advisory Committee, which includes officials from the airlines, airports, general aviation, pilots and labor unions. Under the plan, called the [NextGen Priorities Joint Implementation Plan](#), the FAA and the various components of the aviation industry share responsibility to meet specific milestones, locations, timelines and metrics for “high benefit, high readiness” NextGen initiatives. These initiatives include Multiple Runway Operations, Performance Based Navigation, Surface and Data Communications. In response to the report, leaders of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Aviation Subcommittee [commended](#) the FAA on NextGen.

From the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

10/24/2014—The FRA [published](#) its Southwest Multi-State Rail



Planning Guide. The Guide covers Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah with the goal of

identifying potential multi-state network of “candidate corridors” for further evaluation and planning as well as institutional challenges and opportunities related to multi-state rail development and delivery. This is the first multi-state rail planning effort FRA has embarked upon, making it a model for future regional planning efforts.

10/23/2014—FRA Administrator Joseph Szabo attended the dedication of the Englewood Flyover project. The \$133 million Flyover, which received \$126 million from the FRA's [High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail \(HSIPR\) Program](#), aims to eliminate one of the nation's largest rail chokepoints by providing relief and reducing commuter and freight delays for rail congestion in Chicago. About one-third of all rail traffic in the United States travels through the Chicago region and the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program, a partnership between the state

of Illinois, the city of Chicago, freight railroads, Metra and Amtrak, seeks to remove and reduce train congestion.

From the Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

10/27/2014—FTA published [updated instructions](#) and guidance on program administration and the grant application process for Formula Grants for Rural Areas established by MAP-21.

10/24/2014—FTA [published](#) a Final Circular on its Rural Area Formula Grant Program, which provides grantees with instructions and guidance on program administration and the grant application process. Changes include the consolidation of the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program and expanded eligibility of activities under certain set-asides, such as the Appalachian Development Public Transportation Assistance Program.

10/22/2014—FTA began an Online Dialogue on Private Sector Participation from Oct. 22, 2014 to Nov. 26, 2014. The [Private Sector Participation provisions](#) of MAP-21 require FTA to undertake actions, including a rulemaking, to promote more effective utilization of private sector expertise, financing, and operational capacity to deliver costly and complex new fixed guideway capital projects. The Online Dialogue aims to engage grantees and other stakeholders to inform them of the rulemaking, as well as obtain feedback on FTA's proposed guidance on assessments and model contracts.

10/17/2014—FTA, in partnership with The National Center on Senior Transportation (NCST), invites applications for a new [Ladders of Opportunity Grant Program](#)—*Connecting Seniors to Public Transportation*. This competitive grant program will provide funding to communities to develop and test inventions designed to facilitate increased access and usage of public transportation and mobility options by older adults. Funded projects will be required to partner with one of several national initiatives that support aging and are currently operating in local communities nationwide. Grants will be awarded to five

communities at a maximum of \$20,000 each for approximately five months. Proposals are due Nov. 7, 2014.

10/8/2014—FTA [issued](#) a final rule to establish procedures governing the implementation of the FTA's Public Transportation Emergency Relief Program. The Emergency Relief Program allows FTA, subject to the availability of appropriations, to make grants for eligible public transportation capital and operating costs in the event of a catastrophic event, such as a natural disaster. The rule includes a description of eligible projects, the criteria FTA will use to identify projects for funding, and additional details on how FTA will administer the program.

10/6/2014—A joint Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and FTA final rule was [published](#) that adds new categorical exclusions to allow state departments of transportation to bypass certain environmental assessments and impact statements for qualifying highway and transit projects previously required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

From the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

10/21/2014—FHWA [published](#) a notice, including a state-by-state table, of certain redistributed funds authorized by MAP-21 for FY 2014.

10/9/2014—The Government Accountability Office (GAO) [released](#) a report noting that FHWA fails to track the spending on tens of billions of dollars worth of projects, specifically stating that "FHWA does not collect and report aggregate project-level data for the majority of projects on a routine basis." Additionally, "FHWA tracks and reports aggregate obligations for its 'major projects' (those with a total cost of \$500 million or more), it does not collect and report aggregate obligations for other projects, which represented nearly 88 percent of all fiscal year 2013 spending."

10/1/2014—FHWA published a series of notices for FY 2015 federal-aid highway programs. The [apportionments](#) to states for

core highway programs cover the period beginning on Oct. 1, 2014, and ending on May 31, 2015, when the program authority is set to expire under the Highway and Transportation Funding Act of 2014 ([P.L. 113-159](#)).

09/29/2014—The FHWA has requested comments through Nov. 14 on the agency's initial [2015 draft guidance](#) for deployment and use of connected vehicle technologies.

Other News Items

10/2/2014—The Governors Highway Safety Association [released](#) a new report examining how bicyclist deaths have changed over the past three decades and crash patterns. In 2012, adults accounted for 84 percent of all fatalities compared to 21 percent in 1975. Additionally, the proportion of deaths in urban areas is up from 50 percent in 1975 to 69 percent in 2012, which correlates with a rise in bike commuters, a population that has increased more than 60 percent since 2000.

10/1/2014—The Eno Center for Transportation and the American Society of Civil Engineers [released](#) a new report highlighting the benefits of factoring in long-term costs when planning transportation projects. The report found that emphasis is often placed on upfront project construction costs, whereas planners should incorporate something known as a life cycle cost analysis— a tool that provides a detailed account of total project costs over the long term—in order to fully account for a project's total cost.

9/28/2014—The American Petroleum Institute has [issued a new set of recommended practices](#) for testing and classifying crude oil shipped by rail. The new standard includes procedures for "initial and ongoing sampling and testing" for the purpose of classifying it for transport, new criteria for the frequency of sampling and testing, information about how to ensure the correct packing group is used, and more.

9/23/2014—The Pew Charitable Trusts [published](#) a new report examining funding levels for transportation infrastructure across federal, state and local government. The report noted how

investment has declined, primarily due to the loss of purchasing power for fixed fuel fees.



NCSL Resources

Join us in Washington D.C. Dec. 9-12 at NCSL's [Forum](#). NCSL successfully concluded its 2014 Legislative Summit in Minneapolis, Minn. from Aug. 19-22. [Click here](#) to find resources from the meeting including session presentations, information, videos, and more!

NCSL Staff Contacts

Ben Husch

Committee Director

202-624-7779

[*Ben.husch@ncsl.org*](mailto:Ben.husch@ncsl.org)

Melanie Condon

Policy Specialist

202-624-3597

[*Melanie.condon@ncsl.org*](mailto:Melanie.condon@ncsl.org)