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## LEGISLATIVE Alert

AMERICAN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION



February 23, 2010

### **U.S. Senate Vote Clears HIRE Act For Passage – Legislation Contains Long-Term Extension of SAFETEA-LU**

Yesterday, the U.S. Senate took a significant step toward passing the Hiring Incentives to Restore Employment (HIRE) Act, (the most recent Jobs bill). By a bipartisan vote of 62-30, the Senate voted to end debate on the bill, preventing a filibuster. The vote clears the bill for final passage, which is expected to occur on Wednesday, February 24. The HIRE Act extends the authorization of the federal surface transportation program through December 31, 2010. If enacted, the Federal Transit Administration will be able to allocate the remaining 58 percent of formula funds that have already been appropriated for Fiscal Year (FY) 2010.

To overcome the threat of a filibuster, at least 60 Senators needed to vote in favor of the cloture motion to end debate, which required the support of at least two Republican Senators. In Monday's vote, five Republican Senators supported the cloture motion: Kit Bond (R-MO), Scott Brown (R-MA), Susan Collins (R-ME), Olympia Snowe (R-ME), and George Voinovich (R-OH). Senator Ben Nelson (D-NE) was the only Democrat to vote against the cloture motion. After the vote, Senator Voinovich issued a statement that his support for the HIRE Act was based partially on a commitment from Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) to hold a vote on a long-term transportation authorization bill later this year.

In addition to the extension of surface transportation programs, the HIRE Act also provides a transfer of \$19.5 billion of general funds to the Highway Trust Fund, including \$4.8 billion to the Mass Transit Account. This transfer is expected to ensure the solvency of the Mass Transit Account through the end of FY 2011. The Senate Finance Committee based the transfer on restoring interest payments to the Highway Trust Fund. The HIRE Act would also expand the Build America Bonds program, allowing states and local governments to borrow at lower costs to finance more infrastructure projects and put additional people to work.

APTA and many of its members played an important role in influencing the outcome of this vote by contacting key Senators and urging them to support the bill. Several Senators, including Environment & Public Works Committee Chairwoman Barbara Boxer (D-CA) credited the transportation industry for its efforts in advancing the bill. APTA would like to thank all of its members who answered the call to reach out to their Senators to help clear the way for passage of this important bill!

After Senate passage, the HIRE Act will move to the U.S. House of Representatives, which would need to pass it later this week before the current extension of surface transportation programs expires on February 28. The House passed a much larger Jobs bill late last year that included an extension of The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) through September 30 of this year and additional stimulus spending for public transportation. The House must decide whether to accept the Senate bill "as-is," or attempt to amend it to address some of their differing priorities. While negotiations are ongoing, with little time left until the expiration of the current continuing resolution, some agreement must be reached this week – either passage of the HIRE Act or another short term extension - to allow the government to continue to expend surface transportation funds.

## Congressional Action following the HIRE Act

APTA is calling on Congress to pass further jobs legislation (in addition to the HIRE Act) that includes subsequent public transportation investment and a long-term authorization of surface transportation programs. Congressional leaders have vowed to attempt to work on subsequent jobs bills in the coming weeks, including a possible tax package, which may extend the alternative fuels tax credit that expired at the end of last year. APTA will continue to work with Congress to push for the extension of the tax credit, and seek additional funding for public transportation in these future bills. APTA members have identified more than \$15 billion in public transportation projects that could provide much needed American jobs and crucial funding for financially strapped public transportation systems that have been affected by the recession.

### Action Call for APTA members:

Contact your Members of Congress to communicate the following:

- Thank Senators who supported the HIRE Act; express disappointment to those who did not.
- Remind Senators and Representative how stimulus funds have helped public transportation systems and supported and created jobs.
- Urge your Members to support further Jobs legislation with new transit funding and a full long-term authorization of surface transportation programs after the HIRE Act is passed.
- Urge Members to include the alternative fuels tax credit in any upcoming jobs bill.

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