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February 1, 2011

## House and Senate Committee Leaders Unveil Preliminary Plans for Surface Transportation Authorization Legislation

As the newly sworn-in 112<sup>th</sup> Congress begins to organize for the legislative business ahead, a few key committee leaders have begun to reveal their plans for the next surface transportation authorization bill.

Last week, in a series of meetings with transportation industry groups (including APTA President Bill Millar), new Transportation & Infrastructure Chairman John Mica (R-FL) announced his commitment to writing a full six-year bill this year, and outlined four guiding principles for the legislation. Chairman Mica plans to introduce legislation that will achieve the following:

- 1) **Stabilize the Highway Trust Fund** by ensuring that spending authorized in the bill will not exceed actual Trust Fund receipts.
- 2) **Recapture unspent federal funds within the transportation program.** Specific funds have not been identified, but the Chairman has noted that there are significant unobligated funds available throughout the federal transportation program. These funds could be used to supplement trust fund spending.
- 3) **Utilizing public private partnerships and other alternative financing mechanisms to leverage federal funds.** Chairman Mica plans to encourage more investment from the private sector for transportation projects. He expressed interest in expanding and improving current authorized programs that provide loan assistance and innovative financing such as the Transportation Innovative Financing and Innovation Act (TIFIA) program and Building America Bonds. He is also open to developing new programs to encourage private investment.
- 4) **Streamline programs and speed project delivery.** The Chairman noted that delays in project delivery add unnecessary costs to programs funded with federal dollars.

Chairman Mica's goals for the legislation are based on the premise that there will be no new resources available to increase trust fund revenues, and that the political climate is not favorable for a general increase in spending without budget offsets. Therefore, he is committed to "doing more with less" and finding alternative means of continuing spending at the current or an increased rate.

Also during these meetings, Chairman Mica announced that he would be travelling to more than a dozen cities across the country during the month of February to conduct a series of field hearings and listening sessions to gather ideas for the new authorization bill. The Chairman wants a participatory process in developing his legislation, and has encouraged the transportation community to share information and ideas for the policy and financing portions of his legislation. APTA will play an active role in this process, and encourages all members to attend any events in their local area. Details on dates and locations of the field hearings and listening session will be forwarded as soon as they are finalized.

In the Senate, Environment and Public Works Committee Chairman Barbara Boxer (D-CA) has also set the passage of a surface transportation bill as a top priority for her Committee in the coming months. The Chairman has set a goal of moving a bill through her Committee by Memorial Day, but noted she needs cooperation from a number of other committees that have jurisdiction over different components of the

transportation program, including the Senate Banking Committee, which must write the transit title. In related news, Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD), was officially named Chairman of the Senate Banking Committee last week. Chairman Boxer has not discussed in detail her goals for the bill, but has stated that she understands the fiscal constraints, and plans to work together with Chairman Mica in the House with the common goal of completing the bill this year.

Meanwhile, Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said that the Obama Administration hopes that a bill will be completed by August. The Administration's outlook on authorization should become clearer the week of February 14, when the Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 budget proposal is submitted to Congress. While the President called for a new commitment to rebuilding America's infrastructure during his State of the Union address this week, including access to high speed rail for 80 percent of Americans within the next 25 years, policies and funding specifics were not given. The President also stated that he will veto any legislation sent to him that includes earmarks. This could have a significant impact on the development of the next authorization bill, as well as annual appropriations bills for transportation programs.

For questions or additional information, please contact Paul Dean of APTA's Government Affairs Department at (202) 496-4887 or [pdean@apta.com](mailto:pdean@apta.com).

### **Continuing Resolution Set to Expire March 4 Amid Republican Calls for Spending Cuts**

The continuing resolution (CR) that is currently funding government operations as well as the extension of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) will expire on March 4.

Republicans leaders in the House have continued express their desire to reduce the federal deficit by cutting funds within the federal discretionary budget, including for transportation programs. Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) announced that the House will vote on a slimmed down CR the week of February 14 that will reduce non-security discretionary spending to FY 2008 levels, which coincides with the release of the President's FY 2012 budget. **APTA strongly opposes this effort, and urges all members to contact their Senators and Representatives to express your opposition to this measure.**

#### **Action Alert**

When speaking to your member, please make the following points:

- State your opposition to any legislative proposal to reduce the current level of funding for public transportation programs.
- Explain to your members that continued federal investments are critical in your community to maintain assets in a state-of-good-repair, begin or complete critical projects, and maintain current levels of service.
- Let them know that investments in public transportation infrastructure creates jobs and is vital to maintain our country's economic competitiveness.

Efforts among House Democrats to preserve transportation funding include a sign-on letter addressed to House Leadership spearheaded by Representative Mike Michaud (D-ME).

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