

Parsons Brinckerhoff Washington Update - July 16, 2015 - Interim Update

As of today, there are 16 days until the temporary MAP-21 extension expires on July 31 and Congress will be in session on only 9 of those days.

Late yesterday, the full House passed HR 3038, a short-term extension of MAP-21, by a vote of 312 to 119 (180 Republicans and 132 Democrats voted for the bill and 65 Republicans and 54 Democrats voted against it). A number of the “no” votes were cast by members of the House T&I Committee and other transportation supporters who believe that Congress should simply raise the federal gas tax or find other revenue to pass a long-term bill now, rather than an on-going series of short-term bills.

The House bill provides \$8B in additional revenue for the Highway Trust Fund through a variety of tax compliance measures and other miscellaneous fees. The extension funds highway and transit programs at current levels through December 18, 2015. Here is a [link](#) to the text of the bill and a [link](#) to the vote roll call. The very conservative Club for Growth announced it would “score” the vote, saying that it objected to the budget gimmicks used to pay for the bill.

Before the vote, the Administration issued a [Statement of Administration Policy \(SAP\)](#) saying it supported the bill, despite the President previously saying he would not sign another short-term extension.

In the Senate, instead of drafting another short-term bill, Republican leaders continue to try to identify sufficient revenue to fund a two to three year bill, but they are having difficulty finding the necessary \$60B to \$80B. Numerous different proposals have been floated, but each proposal seems to have some fatal flaw.

Yesterday, the Senate Commerce Committee approved a six-year bill, S. 1732, which authorizes the MAP-21 programs under its jurisdiction – highway safety, intermodal freight, R&D, and technology. The bill also includes provisions reauthorizing Amtrak and other passenger rail programs. The Republican-drafted Commerce Committee bill passed by a party-line vote of 13 to 11 with all Democrats voting against it. In contrast, the recently passed DRIVE Act, which reauthorizes the highway program, was drafted on a bi-partisan basis and passed by the Environment & Public Works Committee unanimously. The Commerce proposal to turn the popular TIGER discretionary grant program into a freight-only program met significant opposition and was dropped. Democrats offered a substitute to the bill’s freight provisions which was not approved and objected to many of the highway safety provisions.

It appears that the Senate Banking Committee does not plan to introduce or mark-up a MAP-21 transit title. If sufficient revenues can be identified for the overall program, the transit title will likely be brought directly to the Senate floor as part of a substitute amendment incorporating all four committees’ titles.

US DOT Secretary Foxx has sent a letter to all state DOTs warning them that their federal transportation funds may soon run out. Here is a [link](#) to the letter.

With House action on a short-term bill now complete, all attention turns to the Senate to see if they can find the revenue needed for a longer term bill or whether they will end up just agreeing to the House-passed bill.