

PB Washington Update - April 26, 2012 - Interim Update

The long awaited conference to finalize a multi-year surface transportation authorization bill is ready to begin. This week both the House and Senate approved motions to proceed to conference and named their conferees. Traditionally congressional conference committees negotiate the differences between the House and Senate-passed versions of a bill and approve a final bill which is then returned to the House and Senate for an up or down vote with no amendments permitted. The conference on the surface transportation authorization bill will be very unusual because while there is a Senate-passed bill, S. 1813, the House abandoned its multi-year reauthorization bill, HR 7, because of the inability to get enough votes and instead passed only a three-month extension of current law, HR 4348. Theoretically, conferees can only address issues that are "in scope", meaning issues that are included in one or both of the bills. It is not quite clear to anyone how the conference committee will develop a final bill.

Further complicating the conference is the addition to the House bill of a provision approving the highly controversial Keystone pipeline project. The Administration has already announced that it will recommend a veto of the transportation bill if it includes the Keystone provision.

The House and Senate will both be out on recess next week so the first formal meeting of the conferees will not take place until May 8 at 3:00pm. However, in the meantime, the staff will be hard at work sorting out the issues and resolving the non-controversial ones. All the major industry stakeholders groups are engaging in aggressive grassroots efforts to contact conferees while they are home in their districts over recess and urge them to pass a multi-year authorization bill.

The current short-term extension of the surface transportation program expires on June 30, 2012.

Listed below are the members named to the House and Senate conference committee.

Senate - 8 Democrats and 6 Republicans - Senator Boxer will serve as the chair of the entire conference. Conferees are primarily the Chair and ranking minority member of the committees and subcommittees of jurisdiction.

Democrats: EPW - Boxer (CA), EPW/Finance - Baucus (MT), Commerce - Rockefeller (WV), Banking - Johnson (SD), Banking/Finance - Menendez (NJ), Majority Whip - Durbin (IL), Banking/Finance/Democratic Policy Committee Chair - Schumer (NY), Commerce/Finance - Nelson (FL)

Republicans: EPW - Inhofe (OK), EPW - Vitter (LA), Finance - Hatch (UT), Banking - Shelby (AL), Commerce - Hutchison (TX), Energy/Appropriations/author of Keystone Pipeline amendment - Hoeven (ND)

House - Unlike in the Senate, where all the conferees have a say over the entire bill, the House conferees can only negotiate and approve the sections of the bill they have jurisdiction over – the reason for the large number of conferees. Note the large number of freshman Republicans named. Historically, conferees are usually the most senior members. No members of the House Republican leadership were named.

Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure (12 R, 9 D – 21 total):

Mica (R-FL) - Chairman

Young (R-AK)

Duncan (R-TN)
Shuster (R-PA)
Capito (R-WV)
Crawford (R-TX) Freshman
Beutler (R-WA) Freshman
Bushon (R-IN) Freshman
Hanna (R-NY) Freshman
Southerland (R-FL) Freshman
Lankford (R-OK) Freshman
Ribble (R-WI) Freshman

Rahall (D-WV)
DeFazio (D-OR)
Costello (D-IL) Retiring
Norton (D-DC)
Nadler (D-NY)
C. Brown (D-FL)
Cummings (D-MD)
Boswell (D-MO)
T. Bishop (D-NY)

Committee on Energy and Commerce (2 R, 1 D)

Upton (R-MI) – Chairman
Whitfield (R-KY)
Waxman (D-CA)

Committee on Natural Resources (2 R, 1 D)

Hastings (R-WA) – Chairman
R. Bishop (R-UT)
Markey (D-MA)

Committee on Science, Space and Technology (2 R, 1 D)

Hall (R-TX) – Chairman
Cravaack (R-MN) Freshman
E.B. Johnson (D-TX)

Committee on Ways and Means (2 R, 1 D)

Camp (R-MI) - Chairman
Tiberi (R-OH)
Blumenauer (D-OR)