

## ***Governmental Affairs - Federal Legislative Activities - Update***

### ***May 12, 2020***

The Wasatch Front Regional Council (WFRC) has focused on the following two key issues at the federal level over the last few weeks:

1. Ensuring that in any potential COVID-19 legislation that assistance is provided for local governments as Utah and the nation looks to economic recovery -- and noting that investment in transportation infrastructure is an effective means of promoting such recovery.
2. Encouraging that Congress reauthorize, in a timely manner, the federal FAST Act for transportation funding and policy.

WFRC sent two letters to Utah's federal congressional delegation highlighting these priorities and have spoken with their offices to share these priorities and suggestions. This effort has been guided by WFRC Chair Davis County Commissioner Bob Stevenson and WFRC Vice Chair Millcreek Mayor Jeff Silvestrini, in consultation with WFRC staff. As always, we are in regular contact with our public and private sector partner agencies, all of which are working so hard to serve our state during these challenging times.

### **FEDERAL AID / STIMULUS PACKAGE**

Let's begin with the latest news on the next potential COVID-19 funding package. The House Democrats released their package, [HEROES Act](#) (Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act) today. The bill has a total funding package of \$3 trillion and provides about \$1 trillion for state and local governments. Here is a detailed 90-page [bill summary](#), and if you are really interested [here](#) is the entire 1,815 page bill. This bill serves as the starting point for conversations with Senate Republicans and the White House. In the meantime, here are some of the bill's key local government and transportation-related provisions:

- \$500B to states (with half, \$250B, awarded within the first 30 days of enactment: \$51B divided among all 50 states and DC, \$49B awarded based on share of COVID-19 cases, and \$150B awarded based on the state's share of population).
- \$375B to local governments (with \$125B to municipalities using a modified CDBG formula and \$125B to counties based on population -- within the first 30 days of enactment, and \$125B awarded one year after the date of enactment with a similar distribution formula).

- \$15B for Highway Infrastructure Programs to states, including a portion that is sub-allocated to Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), with funding that doesn't require a local match. The total amount that would come to Utah would be approximately \$133M.
- \$15.75B for operating assistance grants to support the transit agencies that require significant additional assistance to maintain basic transit services (\$11.75B distributed by formula to the 14 largest urbanized areas and \$4B available to any grantee or sub-recipient by application to USDOT).
- Provides that, for the duration of the national emergency, transit agencies that serve an urbanized area (population of at least 500,000 individuals and that provide a minimum of 20 million unlinked passenger trips) must require passengers to wear a mask or protective face covering, provide PPE and related sanitizers to workers, and ensure stations and vehicles are properly cleaned and disinfected - this would apply to UTA.

The House is expected to vote on the HEROES Act as soon as this Friday. Early reports from the Senate indicate that the Senate is looking to slow further movement in order to see how the previously passed emergency relief programs are working and then tie any additional aid to liability protections for businesses as states reopen their economies.

As negotiations continue on this legislation, we continue to suggest these two key needs: funding for state and local governments, and investment in transportation and other infrastructure.

WFRC initially sent a letter (click [here](#)) to our Congressional delegation on April 19, 2020 in support of local governments receiving economic relief related to COVID-19. We followed that up this week with another letter; click [here](#) to view the letter WFRC sent to the Utah Congressional delegation and Congressional leadership urging their support of the following two priorities:

#### 1. Economic and revenue relief for local governments.

- The economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on city and county governments has already been devastating. We ask Congress to recognize the needs of all sizes of local governments, as well as our local business community, and provide federal funding assistance to small and medium-sized city and county governments.

#### 2. Infrastructure investment for economic recovery.

- Infrastructure investment spurs economic growth and will be a key strategy moving forward - we urge Congress to invest in transportation infrastructure.
- We recommend that existing funding programs be utilized as a vehicle to distribute funding quickly and effectively. Funding was provided in the CARES Act to assist transit agencies; it should also be provided to help state departments of transportation, and local governments. For local governments, the existing Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP) should be utilized (STBGP is administered by WFRC and the other MPOs in the urbanized areas and by UDOT in rural areas).

Of note, these priorities align closely with those of our national organizations to include the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC), Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO), and National Association of Development Organizations (NADO). View their joint letter by clicking [here](#).

## **FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION REAUTHORIZATION**

Our second key issue focuses on transportation reauthorization. It is essential that Congress, in a timely manner, reauthorize federal transportation legislation. The current federal surface transportation authorization legislation – the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) – expires on Sept. 30, 2020. The FAST Act authorizes critical federal dollars to provide long-term certainty for surface transportation infrastructure planning and investment. Transportation reauthorization is most effective when it is long-term, robust, and has sufficient funding levels for all of the transportation programs in the bill - including for state and local roads, public and active transportation, and rail systems. This stability and predictability of funding is essential for long-term economic investment and vitality, which is needed now more than ever as our nation looks toward recovery.

Click [here](#) to view a letter sent by Congressman John Curtis at our request to the leadership of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee reflecting our shared priorities for the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization bill. Thank you Congressman Curtis!

Utah’s transportation stakeholders, including WFRC, UDOT, UTA, and numerous other public and private sector entities, previously endorsed a shared set of Utah’s Federal Transportation Reauthorization Principles - click [here](#) to view these principles. This subsequent letter about priorities for reauthorization provides further details on issues important to regional planning and to local transportation investment.

Here are our three key priorities identified in Congressman Curtis’ letter:

- Provide full and robust funding for state and local roads, public and active transportation, and rail systems. Specifically, the letter focuses on the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP) and the Metropolitan Planning (PL) Program, which are utilized by local governments and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) such as WFRC as they address the dynamic circumstances in metropolitan regions, especially fast-growing areas such as Utah.
- Modernize the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Program to better reflect the air quality and population growth challenges that it was originally designed to address, which will help Utah to address its air quality challenges.
- Improve the availability of [Access to Opportunities](#) (ATO) data for transportation planning and decision making, by including in the transportation reauthorization legislation the substance of [H.R. 1517 COMMUTE Act](#), cosponsored by Congressmen Curtis and McAdams.

Surface transportation reauthorization legislation is among some of the most important work underway in this Congress. We thank our congressional delegation for their consideration and action.

As always, we will keep you posted as we learn more, and please share with us your priorities and information that you are learning. We hope you are all staying safe and healthy.

Take care,  
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