

Governmental Affairs Update February 1, 2021



Utah Legislature week three: bills, budgets, and infrastructure

Today begins week three of the Utah State Legislature's regular session. The Capitol has been reopened to in-person participation, but still with significant limitations on access due to COVID-19. Fortunately, the Legislature's greatly enhanced system for virtual participation in committees is easy and functional, and has in some ways actually increased public participation in the process.

At last Thursday's WFRC Council meeting, the Council endorsed positions on legislation contained in the [WFRC 2021 Bill Tracker](#). Please take a look at the legislation, and remember that new bills are being introduced every day. Legislation will be discussed (via Zoom) at our regular WFRC weekly legislative meeting on Thursday at 8:00am. Committees will be meeting to deliberate on bills every afternoon this week.

Last week, the Legislature [approved](#) the "base budgets" which contain the majority -- approximately \$21 billion -- of the annual budget, the core of the ongoing activities funded by the State. The remainder of the appropriations process will focus on potential additions to those base budgets for FY22. Appropriations subcommittees are meeting every morning this week. The budgeting process is somewhat in flux, as revised consensus revenue estimates are expected to be released no later than February 15th, which may revise the amounts anticipated to be available in ongoing and one-time revenues next year. Up to this point, the projections have been that the State will have approximately \$1.5 billion in surplus revenues in FY22; this has created high expectations among many sectors that are advocating for additional funding.

Infrastructure Investment

One key topic on which there appears to be broad consensus is that the State should authorize additional investment in infrastructure, especially in transportation and broadband. As we [previously reported](#), the Governor's FY22 budget recommendations proposed additional investment in strategic double-tracking of FrontRunner, as well as investments in broadband, outdoor recreation and trails, and rural infrastructure, among other priorities. And as we [previously reported](#), the Speaker and Senate President both expressed support for infrastructure investment in their opening day messages. Since then, little has happened publicly in terms of actual legislative proposals being offered for appropriation of available one-time funds for infrastructure, or proposals for authorization of additional bonding for infrastructure. Stay tuned.

Infrastructure is of course an area of primary importance to local governments. As such, a

coalition of stakeholders came together to develop and express support and principles for state infrastructure investment. This [letter](#) was submitted today to the Legislature jointly by the [Utah League of Cities and Towns](#) (ULCT), the [Utah Association of Counties](#) (UAC), and Utah's four metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) -- the [Wasatch Front Regional Council](#) (WFRC), the [Mountainland Association of Governments](#) (MAG), the [Dixie MPO](#), and the [Cache MPO](#). A similar [letter](#) was also submitted to Governor Cox and Lieutenant Governor Henderson.

In summary, the letter said that as the State of Utah considers authorizing investments in Utah's infrastructure during the 2021 Legislative Session, we offer support and partnership as we work together for the benefit of all Utahns. To that end, we have jointly developed the following key principles that reflect priorities to keep Utah moving:

1. Invest in infrastructure.
2. Support multi-modal transportation choices.
3. Utilize the professional planning and prioritization process.
4. Be fiscally prudent - balance current infrastructure investment needs with long-term fiscal stability.

Active Transportation

A related area of transportation infrastructure that has experienced huge additional use during the pandemic is "active transportation" -- biking and walking as a means of transportation.

A broad coalition of community leaders is urging Governor Cox and the State Legislature to invest in high priority, regionally important "active transportation" (i.e. biking and walking) projects throughout the State. The goal is to complete a core backbone of safe, family-friendly active transportation facilities for all Utahns.

Our State is already a world-class place for recreational biking and is now poised to make the leap to be a world-class place for biking as a means of transportation and commuting. Biking and walking are universally recognized for their myriad personal and community benefits:

- Better air quality
- Decreased traffic congestion
- Increased physical activity
- Decreased healthcare costs
- Improved access to social, educational, and job opportunities
- Expanded recreational opportunities closer to home

Investing now in high-priority active transportation projects will extend these benefits to more Utah residents.

A sign-on letter was developed and is being shared to invite people to express their support. Please take [two minutes](#) and click [HERE](#) to read the full letter and add your name in support of this effort.

Federal Update

The work of the new Congress and Biden Administration is underway. The Senate has begun to confirm President Biden's cabinet nominees and the Senate is expected to begin the second, historic impeachment trial of former President Donald Trump the week of February 8th. In his first several days in office, President Joe Biden has already signed more than 20 Executive Orders on a wide array of topics ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic to immigration, the U.S. Census, racial equality, healthcare, mask requirements on interstate transportation, and on climate change to only name a few.

Recently, President Biden proposed a [\\$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package](#) to, among other things, provide \$1,400 direct payments to qualifying Americans, raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour, direct \$350 billion in federal aid to state and local governments, as well as an additional \$20 billion for public transit agencies. This week, absent any significant bipartisan support for this proposal, Democratic Congressional Leaders in the House and Senate are preparing to initiate the budget reconciliation

process, which will allow for a major COVID-19 relief bill to pass the Senate by a simple majority vote and bypassing the normal 60-vote filibuster threshold. It is still unclear what a final bill will include, but it seems very likely that Congress will pass another round of COVID aid/economic stimulus in the coming weeks.

President Biden has also made his intention clear to pursue a [major infrastructure investment bill](#) this year. This effort will almost certainly include a Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill -- the current authorization (the FAST Act) is set to expire at the end of September 2021. This will be critically important legislation for Utah's transportation system and agencies, because it will establish federal funding authorizations and policy changes for a variety of federal transportation programs over the next five to six years.

Last, [Utah's Congressional Delegation Members](#) have been appointed to serve on some key House and Senate Committees. Notably, Senator Lee is expected to continue to serve on the Senate Energy & Natural Resources and Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committees. Senator Romney is expected to play an outsized role in the new Congress. He has a history of working with more moderate Senators on both sides of the aisle to reach bipartisan compromises in the Senate, a role that will be especially important in a 50-50 split Senate.

Representative Stewart will also continue to serve on the House Appropriations Committee and will, thereby, play a role in shaping the FY22 appropriations bills that will fund key federal agencies, as well as formula and competitive grant accounts important to our Region. Representative Curtis was recently named to the powerful House Energy and Commerce Committee, with broad jurisdiction in the House, and he will have a seat on the Committee's Environment and Climate Subcommittee. First-term Representative Blake Moore will serve on the House Armed Services and House Natural Resources Committees -- both of critical importance to Utah. First-term Representative Burgess Owens will serve on the Judiciary Committee.

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