

March 27, 2020

Appropriations asks:

FY21 Budget

- Amtrak
 - Sustain current levels of Amtrak funding with similar shares set aside for National Network and Northeast Corridor as in FY2020.
 - Set aside \$25 million for design and engineering work toward replacing the Long-Distance Superliner equipment.
- Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI)
 - Appropriate \$2 billion (up from \$330 million in FY20), ensuring adequate long-term funding.
 - America's passenger rail infrastructure requires significant investment to maintain and expand service. These investments are costly and occur over many years and therefore require stable, sustained, multi-year funding. To provide communities with the necessary resources, we proposed the following:
 - Make all funding available over multiple years, similar to how the Federal Transit Administration's Capital Investment Grant (CIG) program operates. This would allow applicants to develop projects over a longer term and which may require a more significant financial commitment than would be available in any one fiscal year.
 - Create a \$100 million set-aside for expanding three-day-a-week to seven day service to include capital for rail and station infrastructure, and equipment. (This will allow the Cardinal to begin more frequently service).
- Restoration and Enhancement Grant Program
 - Appropriate \$100 million for the FRA's Restoration and Enhancement Grant Program to enable new state-supported services to launch.
 - The Restoration and Enhancement program has proven to be an important tool in reconnecting communities to one another, and to larger metropolitan areas.
 - The program also helps establish a resilient, durable economy in the places it connects by linking people with employers, healthcare providers, and educational opportunities.

COVID Stimulus Phase IV

Transportation for America (T4America) is an alliance of elected, business and civic leaders from communities across the country, united to ensure that states and the federal government step up to invest in smart, homegrown, locally-driven transportation solutions – because these are the investments that hold the key to our future economic prosperity. t4america.org

- Rural Broadband Access
 - Appropriate \$1 billion for the USDA ReConnect Program, a \$450 million increase from the program's current \$550 million. Decades of working to bring broadband to rural parts of the United States have made it clear to broadband planners that many areas face obstacles that cannot be overcome with any of the existing funding options.
 - Set aside \$135 million of the \$450 million increase for rural areas with inherent geographic challenges. This includes areas where mountains, water bodies, national and state parkland, and other obstacles make commercial provision of broadband exceedingly nonviable. Lessons learned from efforts like the EPA-funded Cool and Connected program showed that areas bordered by these geographic features face even steeper challenges that often prove insurmountable when building the business case for expanded broadband service.
 - \$270 million should be set aside to ensure that rural broadband achieves 25mbps upload speed to ensure functional telemedicine and distance learning capabilities. In addition to these critical services, improved bandwidth will improve viability of small businesses and manufacturers that are currently limited by their internet connectivity during parts or all of their working days.
 - \$45 million of increase should be set aside to allow local units of government in rural communities to better survey the broadband connectivity within their jurisdiction. Relying on FCC Form 477 data that dramatically overstates coverage. The formula marks census blocks with a single served home as served, even if the rest of the census block is unserved or underserved. Surveys conducted with these funds should generate data at the address level. Further, funds should be set aside for allowing citizens to report their internet connectivity on public computers available at libraries, schools, and other public buildings. Additionally, communities should be able to conduct surveys by adding questions to utility bills, or sending questionnaires home with public school students.
- EPA Community Driven Environmental Protection
 - Appropriate \$20 million to the Environmental Protection agency's Integrated Environmental Strategies program for community technical assistance, with a portion set aside for rural communities impacted by the COVID outbreak.
 - This technical assistance would be provided by third party non profits with a demonstrated expertise and ability in rural technical assistance.
 - Applications for the technical assistance to be delivered should be awarded points based on tribal, state, and local governments that can leverage public and private investments to maximize protection of

- environmental resources and improve economic conditions through locally led capacity building.
- USDA Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program
 - Appropriate \$5 billion for the USDA Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program. Currently funded at \$2.8 billion.
 - These funds should ensure the best long term outcome for local governments.
 - Supplemental USDA Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program funds should be distributed for COVID response according to producing best long term outcomes for local governments based on economically viable service provision.
 - To achieve this, applications, points should be awarded for proximity of new projects to existing GSA properties and ease of access for citizens, especially seniors, to required services. Required services include but are not limited to medical providers, educational services, grocery stores, and government offices.
 - COVID Recovery Technical Assistance
 - Appropriate \$100 million to fund an interagency team to facilitate technical assistance.
 - Set aside \$80 million for USDA, EPA, DOT, EDA, and HUD to create an interagency team to facilitate technical assistance to rural areas to aid their recovery from the COVID outbreak.
 - The technical assistance should help communities drive their recoveries to focus on affordable and economically efficient development that begins with understanding the factors that drive their financial metrics.
 - Set aside \$20 million for administration.

Appropriations Report language

Amtrak

- Amtrak Food Service Reform. Amtrak shall establish dining service to include freshly prepared food on all trains that covered more than 750 miles as of March 1, 2020.
 - This includes requirements that onboard food service shall be prepared and served by onboard service employees of the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, and available to all passengers, regardless of accommodation on a paid, prepaid, or other basis.
 - Amtrak shall provide any passenger surveys conducted regarding dining preferences to Congress.
 - Survey reports to Congress shall include results and methodology.

- Amtrak's National Network is essential transportation across much of America. Long Distance trains provide a critical link for many rural residents providing links to economic opportunity and medical care for many.
- To maintain service quality, passenger convenience, and schedule reliability; current routes operated by Amtrak should not be permanently substituted over all or part of their length by bus services.
- Amtrak shall make every effort to maintain a healthy and sanitary environment for passengers and onboard crew on all trains, with special attention paid to trains operating over 12 or more hours on a single route.
- Amtrak shall make every effort to grow the haulage of private cars on regularly scheduled trains and on special charter movements.

Pedestrian and Cyclist Safety at Railroad Crossings

- USDOT should consider the impacts of their policies and practices under the existing rail crossing safety program on the safety of pedestrians and cyclists.
- In many communities, active rail lines bisect neighborhoods and disconnect people from jobs and services. Too often, people cross an active line to go to school, a doctor, or their job. This puts their health and life at risk, as well as putting at risk the people and goods utilizing the rail line.

Surface Transportation Reauthorization and Beyond

Fund grants for other interstate compacts to improve passenger rail service:

- Appropriate \$5 million to promote regional coordination and sustain a vision of passenger rail service, Congress should incentivize the creation of interstate passenger rail compacts and commissions. To achieve this, Congress should:
 - Appropriate \$5 million annually to support funding for new and existing federally authorized passenger rail compacts and commissions. This funding will match non-federal commission funding on a 50-50 basis up to \$500,000 per entity.
 - Entities should include at least two member states and be required to accomplish certain goals;
 - i. Demonstrate progress to maintain, enhance, or restore or expand passenger rail service, including by hiring or contracting appropriate professionals;
 - ii. Receive non-federal matching funds from each of the involved states;
 - iii. Demonstrate work with freight and local partners to develop plans for expansion or restoration of passenger rail;

- iv. Provide technical assistance to local communities to plan for new or expanded passenger rail service to plan for viability and connectivity;
- v. Engage with local communities, non-profits, freights, and non traditional partners;
- o To demonstrate accountability, entities should:
 - i. Provide FRA and Congress with an annual report
 - ii. Get FRA certification that the commission is making progress towards meeting its goals
 - iii. Lose eligibility after three years of failing to meet FRA goals

Passenger Rail Access Tax Credit

- A 50% tax credit for the lesser of “qualified railroad track maintenance expenditures” or \$150,000 per mile of track owned or leased by the eligible taxpayer or other entity. While not explicitly an appropriations ask, we raise it to bring it to the attention of the relevant House and Senate committees.
 - o Qualified railroad track maintenance expenditures and track owned or leased would be defined as they are in the section 45G short line tax credit. These expenditures should include bridge construction and maintenance, signalization, and bridge construction. They should also include station construction, maintenance facility construction, and passenger equipment.
 - o This credit should have the ability to be sold in the manner New Market Tax Credits are currently to be beneficial to Governmental entities, States, commissions, and quasi-governmental organizations.
 - o These credits would be issued to freight railroads, Amtrak, the states, federally chartered commissions, and other operators as designated by the Federal Railroad Administrator in exchange for passenger train access to the line(s) being improved. The operator could be the railroad itself, Amtrak, or other party as approved by the Federal Railroad Administrator.
 - o The passenger service would be operated in accordance with the on time performance metrics that are in place at the time of the issuance of the credit. The service will meet minimum passenger service standards as promulgated by the Federal Railroad Administration.