



# Transfer

Surface Transportation Policy Project's Electronic Update

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## Announcement

For the latest news and information about the reauthorization of TEA-21, visit [Tea3](#).



## [Transfer Archives](#)

## January 17, 2003; Volume IX, Issue 2

### Overdue Budget Tops Agenda as 108<sup>th</sup> Congress Convenes

This week the U.S. Senate completed its work on crafting the overdue FY 2003 omnibus appropriations package, which dramatically constrains domestic spending overall. In the package, the Senate plans presumes spending of \$31.8 billion for highways and \$6.8 billion for transit investment, minus some an across-the-board cut in all domestic spending accounts.



Among the biggest surprises was Senate approval of an amendment, offered by Senators Patty Murray (D-WA), Kay Bailey Hutchinson (R-TX), Robert Byrd (D-WV), Olympia Snowe (R-ME), Fred Hollings (D-SC), Lincoln Chafee (R-RI) and Arlen Specter (R-PA) that calls for Amtrak funding of \$1.2 billion during this fiscal year, the amount Amtrak's CEO David Gunn has indicated is needed to forestall bankruptcy and termination of the Amtrak's service by late spring or early Summer.

Federal agencies are currently operating on funding under a "continuing resolution" that generally provides funding on an interim basis following last year's spending levels. That resolution is set to expire on January 31<sup>st</sup>, the target date Congress had hoped to meet in setting final levels for the current year.

### Senators Propose Sacrificing Mass Transit Account to Secure Additional Highway Funding

Senators Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Max Baucus (D-MT), Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Finance Committee, have indicated their plans to shift a substantial share of existing public transit funding to provide resources – more than \$4 billion – to prop up highway spending levels, which are already at the highest level ever. In fact, the current commitment of \$31.8 billion is about 15 percent higher than what TEA-21 provided.

Remarkably, their plan envisions eliminating the federal Mass Transit Account as a way to increase funding for the highway program in TEA-21 reauthorization without raising gas taxes, by diverting gas tax revenues now committed to public transit investment over to highway spending. As discussed, the plan would terminate all federal assistance to areas with a population of one million or more. Senator Baucus, who also serves on the Environment and Public Works Committee, campaigned on improving transit for rural communities in the November elections and increasing funding commitments to highway programs.

To take action in support of the Mass Transit Account, contact your Senator at 202.224.3121 or <http://www.senate.gov>.

### **White House Opposes Gas Tax Increase to Drive Up TEA-3 Funding**

This week, OMB chief Mitch Daniels signaled that the President does not support the gas tax increase being pushed by Chairman Don Young (R-AK) and other members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. According to Rep. Young, a 2-cent a year increase in the federal gas tax is needed to nearly double highway spending by FY09. In addition to the gas tax increase, lawmakers have suggested indexing the gas tax, transferring ethanol taxes from the General Fund to the Highway Trust Fund, and paying down the balance on gas taxes as other methods to generate new revenues.

For more information on the gas tax shortfall, [click here](#).

### **Federal Officials Offer Glimpse of Administration's TEA-3 Bill**

Administrators of key federal transportation agencies spoke at the 82<sup>nd</sup> Transportation Research Board conference in Washington this week, highlighting themes from the forthcoming administration bill for TEA-21 reauthorization. The administration's theme for the reauthorization of TEA-21, as well as AIR-21 and RAIL-21, is creating a "safer, simpler, and smarter" federal transportation system. Mary Peters, the Federal Highway Administrator, reiterated the administration's commitment to environmental streamlining and agglomerating some federal programs. At the same time, Administrator Peters emphasized the importance to President Bush of developing a "performance-based program that shows results," saying that "we believe that local problems are best solved at the local level."



For more information and the full text of the speeches, [click here](#).

### **Project "Wish-List" Surveys distributed to T&I Committee Members**

House members are being asked to complete a survey describing special projects they would like to see funded as high priority projects in the upcoming transportation bill that will re-authorize TEA-21. The survey, issued by the House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) committee, gives members the opportunity to nominate projects in their district or state that they see as critical in the next six years. Projects that are selected and placed in the bill will be given special, earmarked funding. Though controversial, project earmarks accounted for less than 5% of TEA-21 funding, and have grown to include a far more diverse range of projects over the last decade.

Although multiple projects may be submitted, Committee staffers indicate that the overall funding level will determine the limit on requests for TEA-3. However, some Hill aides optimistically suggest that T&I Committee members have reportedly been given a budget of \$30 million per member

To contact your Member of Congress about special projects, visit <http://www.house.gov>. To view the "Dear Colleague" letter on member requests, visit [Tea3](#).

For more information on the High Priority Project program, [click here](#).

### U.S. DOT Orders Civil Rights Audit of Montgomery MPO

Last year, the MPO serving Montgomery, Alabama was given a conditional re-certification and orders to improve public participation and compliance with civil rights laws. Responding to complaints brought by the Montgomery Transportation Coalition, FTA officials recently extended the conditional certification status to delve deeper into the MPO's ability to comply with civil rights laws. Although the City of Montgomery accounts for 70 percent of the population in the MPO service area, and 49 percent of residents are racial minorities, the city claims only one-third of the votes on the MPO board, which has no minority representation. Auditors are expected to evaluate the MPO's draft public involvement plan, bylaws, and outreach to underserved populations for compliance with civil rights laws.



For more details, [click here](#).

### Building a Common Agenda Among Transportation, Health Officials

STPP convened an all day workshop on the front end of the Transportation Research Board meeting in Washington, DC, on Saturday, January 11th, with the explicit aim of uniting transportation and public health interests around an agenda to better promote physical activity and healthier, more active lifestyles through the transportation planning process. Participants from local government, health and transportation backgrounds voted on a host of transportation policy solutions to increase physical activity and improve public health. The top four recommendations from workshop attendees: (1) require routine accommodation of bicyclists and pedestrians in all transportation projects; (2) suballocate or devolve state and federal transportation funds to metropolitan planning organizations at the local level; (3) reward local governments who promote infill development and more walkable communities with transportation incentive grants; (4) develop a strong public relations campaign aimed at both decisionmakers and the public.

### National Transportation Data Unveiled

At a special seminar on January 11, the U.S. Department of Transportation unveiled the 2001 National Household Travel Survey (NHTS). The survey shows how Americans get around day-to-day, and underpins many discussions of transportation policy and issues. Preliminary results on transit showed an increase in transit mode share in areas with rail transit service, with the overall mode share holding steady since 1995, the time of the last survey.



Some data collection improvements have been undertaken since 1995, including better recording of walking trips and some Spanish-language interviews for the first time (no other non-English languages were used). The first data release is available now on the NHTS website, where a free registration is required.

[Click here](#) for more information on the survey and access to the database.

### Detroit's Transit Roller-Coaster

Despite two years of delicate bi-partisan negotiations in the Michigan House and Senate, outgoing Michigan Gov. John Engler vetoed legislation that would have created the Detroit Area Regional Transit Authority. Used as political payback for the failure of the Legislature to expand charter schools in Detroit, the vetoed legislation would have brought the separate bus systems that serve Detroit and its suburbs under the coordination of one governing body, a move that has been sought after for years by Detroit employers.



"With two overlapping transit agencies, one notorious for failing equipment and high costs, the Detroit region has lagged all top U.S. metro areas in full and adequate transit service," says Washington Post writer, Neal Peirce. The setback may prove to be temporary, as incoming Governor Jennifer Granholm has made DARTA her number one priority and said she's prepared to sign the bill if the Legislature passes it again. Granholm also recently established a state-level committee to address land use policy.

For more information on the DARTA debate, [click here](#).

Transfer is written and edited by John Goldener of the Surface Transportation Policy Project, with contributions by Linda Bailey, Andrea Broaddus, James Corless, Jeremy Gunderson, Nancy Jakowitsch, and Kevin McCarty. Readers are invited to reprint newsletter items; proper citation is appreciated. If you are not currently subscribed, please send us a note via e-mail to: [transfer@transact.org](mailto:transfer@transact.org). Be sure to include your full mailing address and name of your organization, phone and fax numbers. For comments and suggestions about Transfer's content, contact John Goldener at [jgoldener@transact.org](mailto:jgoldener@transact.org).

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