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FEDERAL UPDATE

Lawmakers Grapple with Transportation Funding Issues before Congressional Recess

The House took up an emergency package of fiscal extenders before the start of the August congressional to ensure that certain federal programs, including the Highway Trust Fund, stay afloat before lawmakers go on their month-long break. The bill (HR 3357), introduced Tuesday by House Ways and Means Chairman Charles Rangel (D-NY) and House Appropriations Committee chairman David Obey (D-WI), included an extension of funding for the federal Highway Trust Fund by transferring \$7 billion from the general Treasury to the Fund for federal highway and transit programs. The House passed the extenders bill on Wednesday by a vote of 363-68 and the Senate followed suit and cleared the bill on Thursday by a vote of 79-17. The National Trust is closely monitoring both the temporary extension and permanent reauthorization of funding for the Highway Trust Fund as it affects historic preservation projects funded by the Transportation Enhancements program.

High Speed Rail Funding an Issue for Historic Preservation

The Senate Appropriations Committee approved this week a \$122 billion spending measure for housing and transportation programs that contains substantially less funding for high-speed rail than its House companion. The Trust has been monitoring high-speed rail developments in Congress because of its potential effect on historic resources adjacent to rights-of-ways in the path of the system. The bill would include \$1.2 billion for high-speed-rail grants. The House-passed bill (HR 3288), however, would increase the amount for high-speed rail to \$4 billion with the stipulation that the Transportation Department could transfer \$2 billion of it to a national infrastructure bank, if such a bank is authorized before the end of fiscal 2010. The Senate bill does not include any money for a national infrastructure bank.

The Trust is concerned about a dramatic influx of funding for siting and building high speed rail corridors in a short period of time as it may affect historic main street towns and cultural resources located near these rail lines or terminals. Preservationists want assurances that high-speed rail grants will not ignore Section 4(f) review requirements in any effort to expedite or streamline funding for these projects. Section 4(f) is one of the strongest protections in federal law protecting historic and cultural resources from any adverse effects of federally-funded transportation projects.

NPS Nominee Jarvis Considered in Senate

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee held its confirmation hearing on Tuesday for Jon Jarvis, nominee for Director of the National Park Service. Jarvis was questioned by the Senate panel on issues ranging from snowmobiles in the national parks, gun rights, helicopter over-flights of Crater Lake in Oregon, downsizing of the NPS Northeast regional office, and the

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creation of buffer zones for NPS park units.

Sen. Robert Bennett (R-UT) asked about the agency's role in objecting to energy development on public lands near national parks and whether Jarvis supports "buffer zones" to protect parks. Jarvis said he is "not a believer" in buffer zones and that the agency does not have veto power over energy development projects on other lands. But he added that he strongly believes in consultation and stressed that he will work with other land management agencies to prevent "the kind of open conflict that has been created so many times." On that note, the National Trust is closely monitoring the siting of solar development projects and their effect on historic and cultural resources located on public lands, and the impact of commercial development in and around National Park units — such as the Wilderness Civil War battlefield site in Orange County, Virginia.

Conservation System Alliance Outlines Funding for FY'11 in Salazar Letter

Conservation
Alliance Letter
Urges
Administration to
Seek \$100
Million in
Funding for
National
Landscape
Conservation
System in FY'11

The Conservation System Alliance, which includes the National Trust, delivered a coalition letter signed by 46 organizations on Tuesday addressed to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar in support of budgetary improvements for the National Landscape Conservation System in FY11. The letter focused on the challenges facing the Conservation System, including "a lack of budget clarity" which "currently hinders BLM from planning, executing and reporting achievements, while losing efficiency through a complicated budget structure," also stated that "bare-bones funding prevents unit managers from investing in partnerships to achieve savings, and keep dedicated staff from meeting conservation mandates found in authorizing legislation and presidential proclamations."

The Alliance letter also outlined the need for at least \$100 million for the Conservation System in the Department of Interior's (DOI) FY 2011 budget as "an appropriate increase over historic funding levels when accounting for inflation, uncontrollable cost increases, [future] growth of the System, significant increases in visitation and associated management challenges, and project backlogs dues to years of underfunding." The Alliance urged Secretary Salazar to consider that the System needs support from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) "for acquisitions that would enhance public access and recreation, ease management, and improve wildlife habitat, including corridors important for climate change adaptation." In addition, the letter asked Salazar to consider dedicating half of the funding earmarked for the Interior Department's Climate Change Initiative for the Conservation System in FY'11.

