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To: RAILCET
From: Ray Chambers
Date: July 14, 2023

Subject: **Intelligence Report – APTA Intercity Passenger Rail Steering Committee Meeting for July**

The July APTA High Speed and Intercity Passenger Steering Committee Highlights

In an unexpected turn of events the House Appropriations Republican majority eliminated much of the rail infrastructure program. Two of the hardest hit programs were Amtrak and California High Speed Rail. The bill is expected to be “marked-up” next week, meaning passed out of Committee and ready to take to the Floor of the House for a vote.

This was the major issue discussed by the APTA Intercity Passenger Rail Steering Committee (of which I am a member). Ward McCarragher, VP for Government Affairs at APTA led the discussion. Others such as Amtrak’s VP for Government Affairs participated. Here are the Highlights:

The bill zeroes out two competitive grant programs. These are the FRA Railroad Crossing Elimination Program , for which \$500 million is authorized, and also the RAISE program for which \$50 million is authorized. The CRISI program, which has been particularly important to short line railroads, was cut more than 50% from the current level of \$258.5 million.

Amtrak was slashed by two-thirds. Amtrak VP Bruno Maestri said such a cut would “shut her down.” Funding was also cut off for California High Speed Rail. I have a particular interest in the FRA Corridor ID (CID) program and ask several questions. It is good news. CID will be mostly funded from the State-Federal Partnership Program. This program was largely “pre-appropriated” under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law at \$7 billion a year for the next five years. These “pre-appropriated” funds were not cut in the Republican bill. So, the important CID program continues. Deborah Kobrin, FRA Government Affairs spokesperson affirmed they expect the projects to be announced in the October-November Period. I noted several of the more than 100 projects filed may be duplicative. Importantly, under the BIL authorization, states may choose to partner with rail operations, construction and maintenance partners rather than Amtrak for new routes. I suggested to Kobrin potential stakeholders should be able to engage on these candidate projects with FRA prior to final selection. Kobrin said FRA would be open to such discussions. (I have proposed to the RAILCET Trustees that we launch a special initiative together with the private operating contractors to analyze each project prior to final selection. There will be a framework proposal to the Trustees next week).

Kobrin noted although a massive amount of money was authorized in the BIL for passenger rail, the competitive grant programs are now oversubscribed by about four times (not counting the proposed House slash)

The consensus of the group was the Committee hatchet job on passenger rail will be upheld through the House. However, the Senate will not permit such serious cutbacks. The Senate Committee should move on to the same appropriation prior to the August recess and come out with a much larger number for passenger rail. However, there is always a danger a House-Senate Conference will “split the baby” and there will be a reduction for intercity passenger rail.

The remainder of the agenda produced lively discussion. I was on the agenda to review the Global Ukraine Rail Task Force donor program for distressed rail workers and their families. Former FRA Administrator Jolene Molitoris is Ukraine Task Force Rail Chair, and I am Vice Chair. Jolene and I are scheduled to make a presentation at the August APTA Steering Committee Meeting.

Agenda:

1. Opening remarks by HS&IPR Committee Chair Chris Brady
 2. Discussion of House THUD Appropriations bill: Chris Brady / Ward McCarragher / Peter Peyser / Mark Kadesh / Bruno Maestri / Other perspectives
 - [APTA July 12 Legislative Report](#)
 3. FRA Update – Deborah Kobrin
 4. APTA Draft Comments on Standards for High-Speed Rail Trainsets (attached)
 5. APTA Rail Conference Feedback & Take-aways
 - HS&IPR Meeting / dinner (agenda attached FYI)
 - Conference sessions
 - Other feedback?
 6. June 13 meeting with Administrator Bose on Project Delivery and Cost Containment / Next Steps (summary of ideas attached)
 7. Possible HS&IPR discussion with STB / Issues paper
 8. 2024 HSR Conference Options
 9. Efforts to Assist Ukrainian Railroad Workers
 10. SPEEDLINES update
 11. 2023 In-person meetings
 - Sunday, October 8 in Orlando
 - December in DC
 12. Open Mic / News & Information Sharing
 - Friday, June 2, 12:00 noon ET
 - Sunday, June 11 (in-person meeting in conjunction with APTA Rail Conference)
 - Friday, July 7, 12:00 noon ET
 - Friday, August 4, 12:00 noon ET
 - Friday, September 8, 12:00 noon ET
 - Sunday, October 8 (in-person meeting in conjunction with APTA TRANSform Conference)
 - Friday, November 3, 12:00 noon ET
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