

POLITICO

Plenty of transpo action on the Hill today — DOT offers legislative proposal — But some lawmakers shrug it off

By Adam Snider

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TODAY IN TRANSPORT ON THE HILL: A House T&I panel holds a morning hearing on air service to small and rural communities. Expect some talk about DOT's recent decision to end Essential Air Service subsidies for 13 small airports, as well as a showing from the families of those killed in the Colgan Air Flight 3407 commuter plane crash that killed dozens of people in 2009.

Later today, T&I's special P3 panel meets to discuss the state experience with public-private partnerships and Senate Commerce holds a TSA oversight hearing with Administrator John Pistole. "The looming question now is whether Congress is ready to give up its stubborn hold on resources that the TSA needs to meet its mission, across the transportation spectrum, and protect this country from ever-changing threats," Commerce Chairman Jay Rockefeller said ahead of today's hearing.

Sens. Tom Carper and John Barrasso will hold a roundtable on the importance of freight movement in the transportation network this afternoon. "When freight movement is inefficient, unreliable, or expensive, it imposes a cost on businesses that cuts into their profitability and makes them less competitive," Carper will say in his opening remarks, according to a prepared copy shared with MT.

IT'S GROW TIME: The ball is in Congress's court. After five years of asking for leadership from the administration on transportation, lawmakers got what they wanted — a concrete legislative proposal from the Department of Transportation. The GROW AMERICA Act is the first ever comprehensive road and transit bill proposal from President Barack Obama's administration. First things first, acquaint yourself with the bill text (<http://1.usa.gov/1kbRwN6>), a section-by-section analysis (<http://1.usa.gov/1kjvXM1>) and a summary (<http://1.usa.gov/POxiAF>). DOT also has a series of fact sheets on various aspects like innovative financing and safety: <http://1.usa.gov/1u0o58S>

WHAT'S IN IT? Tracking the already-announced plan for a \$302 billion, four-year bill, the proposal includes \$199 billion for highways and road safety and \$72 billion for transit and to “expand transportation options.” That comes out to a 22 percent hike for road funding and a 70 percent boost on the transit side. Other pots of money include \$19 billion dedicated to rail, a \$10 billion multi-modal freight program, \$5 billion for the TIGER grant program and \$4 billion for TIFIA. The draft bill also includes \$87 billion to shore up the balances in the Highway Trust Fund, increases the penalty for automakers that don’t quickly recall unsafe vehicles, cuts the project approval and permitting timelines and lets states toll existing Interstate lanes — if approved by DOT — to help pay for needed highway repairs.

But wait, there’s more: Kathryn takes a look at the bill’s Positive Train Control and other changes for railroads, impacts on hazmat transportation, bridge closure authority and more provisions. For Pros: <http://politico.pro/QXdbld>

No Plan B: Kathryn writes that if administration officials have a backup plan, they sure aren’t talking about it: “In a call with reporters, Foxx again demurred when asked if the administration has a Plan B in case Congress can’t act on a full reauthorization bill before the existing transportation law expires at the end of September. He answered by noting bipartisan support for a corporate tax overhaul. ‘We’ve also said all along that we’re open to other ideas that emerge as a result of bipartisan discussions on the Hill,’ Foxx said. ‘But this is our proposal and we think that it is the right way to go.’” Pros get it all: <http://politico.pro/POAFb3>

WHAT’S IT STAND FOR? It don’t exactly trip off the tongue, but the GROW AMERICA Act is short for the Generating Renewal, Opportunity, and Work with Accelerated Mobility, Efficiency, and Rebuilding of Infrastructure and Communities throughout America Act...which gives SAFETEA-LU a run for its money in the transportation bill acronym game.

GOOD WEDNESDAY MORNING. Thanks for reading POLITICO’s Morning Transportation, your daily tipsheet on trains, planes, automobiles and ports, where five years ago today, Chrysler filed for bankruptcy protection. Please be in touch: asnider@politico.com and @AdamKSnider.

“Gonna take our stand, in this Chevy van / windows open on the rest of the world...”
<http://bit.ly/liy4ByR> (h/t Phil Weiser)

LIVE TODAY – Morning Cybersecurity! Get online security policy news and analysis with POLITICO’s latest morning must-read. Sign up here: <http://bit.ly/Quy4IQ>.

WILL DOT FORCE THE CONGRESSIONAL HAND? MT checked in with several lawmakers to see if the DOT proposal ups the pressure on Congress to produce a bill. Two members — one a Democratic House T&I member, the other a GOP senator on EPW — both said no but used the question to take swipes at the DOT proposal. “It shouldn’t change anything,” Senate EPW member Jim Inhofe said. “The administration has had a surface transportation proposal before. It’s never funded. It’s never realistic. It’s just something that sounds good to the general public and I anticipate that’s exactly what they’ll have this time,” he said in the same hour the DOT proposal was unveiled. “The Obama administration has not been willing to credibly support taxes, nor have the Republicans,” Rep. Peter DeFazio told MT. “All

the Republicans are against taxes; the Obama administration puts out vague proposals on tax cuts that will create money for the trust fund. No one is talking reality here. ... I'm hopeful that they will come to their senses and kick the thing forward to next year — that's about the best we can do at this point.”

More from Congress: Senate Commerce Chairman Jay Rockefeller called the DOT proposal “one step in the right direction.” House T&I ranking member Nick Rahall said the funding levels are “laudable,” but added that “the devil is always in the details.” T&I Chairman Bill Shuster was fairly noncommittal in his reaction: “I respect that, for the first time, the Obama Administration has put forward a detailed surface transportation proposal. While I'm certain I won't agree with all the details, I look forward to reviewing it.”

MORE TO COME: The Senate Finance Committee will hold a hearing next week on “new routes” for ways to fund surface transportation programs. CBO's Joseph Kile, Virginia Secretary of Transportation Aubrey Layne and officials from Standard and Poor's, AECOM Capital and the Cato Institute will testify at the May 6 hearing. More via Finance: <http://1.usa.gov/1u12jBW>

Related Reading: Former top DOT official Emil Frankel has a new paper for the American Action Forum: “21st Century Transportation Policy: Who Will Pay, and For What?” <http://bit.ly/1km1ay2>

INSERT YOUR OWN CREATIVE WRDA PUN HERE: Rep. Tim Bishop said at yesterday's hearing that the final water resources bill “should” include 11 new projects and cost increases for eight existing ones. Scott and Kevin have more on what that means for the bill: “Negotiators said they're close to a deal on the water projects bill — maybe days or weeks away from unveiling their conference report, which has been a half-year in the making. ... ‘We have an issue or two hanging out there and we hope to resolve those as soon as possible,’ Senate EPW Chairwoman Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), one of the key conferees, told POLITICO on Tuesday. ‘As far as I'm concerned, we could close this out in 15 minutes. It's down to just a couple of ... issues, not projects.’” <http://politico.pro/1m8RpZz>

On the list: T&I member and WRDA conferee John Garamendi said in a release that the Sutter Basin flood control project in California will make the cut after getting a final chief's report from the Army Corps of Engineers.

ALPA DECRIES NORWEGIAN TACTIC: ALPA President Lee Moak is criticizing Norwegian Air CEO Bjorn Kjos for a letter saying the carrier has put on hold a potential purchase of 20 Boeing Dreamliners. Norwegian Air Shuttle's airline spinoff is licensed in Ireland and has applied for a permit to operate in the United States, but transportation unions are strongly opposed. Moak wrote Secretary Foxx to say that Norwegian's threat to pull out of the sale was “resorting to inappropriate coercive tactics, which the Department should not countenance.” Letter: <http://politico.pro/1m98m6g>

THE AUTOBAHN (SPEED READ)

- Officials dispute private search company's claim that it has found wreckage from the missing Malaysia Airlines plane in the Bay of Bengal. CNN: <http://cnn.it/1maButM>
- Google's self-driving car is navigating D.C. streets. Transpo team alum Jessica Meyers has the Pro story: <http://politico.pro/1izwGpw>
- Air Canada becomes the first foreign carrier to participate in the TSA's PreCheck expedited screening program. USA Today: <http://usat.ly/1mXgu6I>
- A federal inspector tipped off a North Dakota rail yard about an upcoming visit. In These Times: <http://bit.ly/1fOsXof>
- New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie nominates former state Attorney General John Degnan, a Democrat, as chairman of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. POLITICO: <http://politi.co/QZvd5S>
- This year's "Potholepalooza" in D.C. filled double the number of potholes as the 2013 campaign — and that was only halfway through the 2014 initiative. DDOT: <http://1.usa.gov/1rLf5Cv>

THE COUNTDOWN: MAP-21 expires and DOT funding runs out in 154 days. FAA policy is up in 519 days. The mid-term elections are in 188 days and the 2016 presidential election is in 923 days.

CABOOSE — Who's down with the DMV? The DMV is about as popular as Congress nowadays — and that's saying something. But a look at some data (sadly not for all states) finds that some people are actually happy with their state DMV. The District ranks 14th — now let's see if it stays that way after hundreds of thousands of us residents have to get a new license over the coming months. Look up your state and more at DMV.com: <http://bit.ly/1jexHrl>