

POLITICO

Finance looks at the funding quagmire — WRDA offer on the table — Airfare 'transparency' fight is on — More on Oberstar

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THE \$64,000 (OR \$100 BILLION) QUESTION: “It doesn’t get much more important than this, particularly right now.” That’s Senate Finance Chairman Ron Wyden’s self-described approach to today’s hearing on new ways to fund transportation projects as the Highway Trust Fund marches steadily toward bankruptcy. “We’ll look at a variety of ideas,” he told reporters yesterday. His committee looks at the funding quagmire and how to solve it today at a hearing that features testimony from EPW Chairwoman Barbara Boxer, who just so happens to be readying to put out her transportation bill this week. She’s aiming for Thursday, she told reporters in the Capitol basement. The hearing will also feature testimony from a CBO analyst, Virginia’s transportation secretary and officials from Standard & Poor’s, AECOM Capital and the Cato Institute. More on the hearing: <http://1.usa.gov/1u12jBW>

Why this bill matters: S&P Senior Managing Director Jayan Dhru will tell the panel that the United States is still dropping in the infrastructure ranks. A snippet from the prepared remarks: “...overall government spending on U.S. public infrastructure has fallen to a 20-year low of 1.7% of GDP. This is substantially lower than we see in most developed countries and more than five times lower in relative terms to what is spent in Canada. This figure underscores the conventional wisdom that the U.S. is falling behind on its infrastructure needs and that the funding gap continues to grow.”

On funding: “Most lobbyists in town recognize that if there’s going to be a vehicle that has revenue offsets, this would be it,” a tax lobbyist told Pro’s Brian Faler. “I’ve been telling all my people that this is the only thing that you need to be worried about because members like highway bills.” <http://politico.pro/Q6QIRu>

WRDA IS THE WORD: A long-sought bicameral deal on the Water Resources Development Act is inching closer to reality, according to several senators who say they’ve sent an offer to the House. Negotiators on the Senate EPW panel made a proposal to their House counterparts, news that was confirmed by a House aide who said no deal was in place Monday evening. Boxer said

that lawmakers are “very close” and “the House has to get back to us.” Conferee John Barrasso warned that nothing was a done deal, saying “I haven’t signed off on anything final.”

FIRST LOOK — Motorcycle fatalities: Today the Governors Highway Safety Association is out with a new estimate on motorcycle deaths in 2013, projecting a 7 percent drop compared to the year before. If that pans out — the estimate is based on the first nine months of 2013 — it will be only the second year of the past 15 where motorcycle fatalities dropped.

<http://bit.ly/1lSmA99>

IT’S TUESDAY, MAY 6. Thanks for reading POLITICO’s Morning Transportation, your daily tipsheet on trains, planes, automobiles and ports, where on this in 1889, the Paris Exposition opened, featuring a brand new Eiffel Tower that had just been finished just in time for the event. Please be in touch: asnider@politico.com and @[AdamKSnider](https://twitter.com/AdamKSnider) on Twitter.

“On the New York transit line / If my train goes off the track...” <http://bit.ly/1q4tCMe> (h/t Laura Nelson)

THE ‘TRANSPARENCY’ FIGHT IS ON: Sen. Robert Menendez is taking a direct shot at House Transportation Chairman Bill Shuster’s airfare bill, offering his own version that would double the maximum fine for airlines or ticket brokers that don’t display the full price up-front. Menendez’s “Real Transparency in Airfares Act” would bump the top fine from \$27,500 to \$55,000 per day, and comes in response to Chairman Shuster’s “Transparent Airfares Act” that would let airlines and ticket sellers separate the base fare from government-mandated taxes and fees in ads, reversing existing DOT policy. Menendez said in a statement that the House bill is “a gimmick” and added that “contrary to the title, the bill is a bad deal for consumers, and makes airfares less transparent.”

Two sides of the same coin: Airlines and others have come out in support of Shuster’s bill, but travel and consumer groups are opposed to changing the current structure. A4A called the Menendez bill “unnecessary” and said it’s “a solution in search of a problem as airlines already comply with, and DOT actively enforces, the current Full Fare Advertising Rule.” The headline atop an update sent Monday about Shuster’s bill, from the Business Travel Coalition, should sum up how that group feels about it: “George Orwell Would Recognize This Airline Legislation.”

JIM OBERSTAR, THE MAN: Much was made — rightly so — of the void left in the transportation policy world with the sudden death of former House Transportation Chairman Jim Oberstar. But he was much more than a wonk, as Kathryn and I write: “He was a Francophile who was known to question French-speaking witnesses in their native tongue. He was a gourmet chef and enjoyed cooking elaborate meals, recalled David Heymsfeld, his long-time chief of staff on the committee. The son of an iron miner also loved the opera. He was also, simply, a decent man. Oberstar made it a point to get to know his staff, from top to bottom. He went to their weddings and funerals. He sent congratulations when they had children. When they fell ill, he would ask about them and include them in his prayers. And not just his staff — other people’s staffs, too.” Full story: <http://politico.pro/1hsyMIG>

SECOND DRONE SITE APPROVED: The FAA has given operating authority for the second drone test site to the University of Alaska at Fairbanks. The university has been authorized to use Aeryon Scout small drones for animal surveys that will be a test-bed for showing how drones can locate, identify and count large wild animals for survey operations. The first of the six planned test sites is at the University of North Dakota. <http://1.usa.gov/1ur8iQI>

** Since 2012, the Export-Import Bank has provided over \$1 billion in financing support for general aviation aircraft made in the United States. Enabling the Ex-Im Bank to continue promoting exports is essential to meeting the demand for GA aircraft worldwide — while ensuring the industry continues to support good manufacturing jobs. www.gama.aero. **

AIRLINES COLLECTED \$6.2 BILLION IN ANCILLARY FEES LAST YEAR: U.S. passenger airlines took in \$3.3 billion in baggage charges and \$2.8 billion in reservation change fees. The 2013 year-end look from DOT's Bureau of Transportation Statistics (<http://1.usa.gov/StU8QB>) drew some immediate coverage on CNN and the like, most of it focused on the billions of dollars airlines have charged for such fees.

Airports unhappy: Airports aren't happy about the set-up, because those ancillary fees charged by airlines aren't taxed like the base price of a ticket. That means less money for airport and infrastructure projects — at the same time airlines are also fighting an effort to increase the passenger facility charge that could help out airports with a backlog of projects. “This approach from the airlines may be great for the next quarterly report,” said AAAE President and CEO Todd Hauptli, “but the carriers, their customers, and the traveling public will likely pay the price in the long-term as necessary improvements fall further and further behind at airports across the country.” He lays out his concerns in a letter to the leaders of the Senate Finance and Commerce panels. Read it: <http://bit.ly/1scms6c>

THE AUTOBAHN (SPEED READ)

— AP analysis finds big increases in highway fatalities in areas with lots of oil and natural gas traffic. <http://abcn.ws/1rXIEjI>

— BNSF Chairman Matt Rose expects U.S. tank car standards to match those recently announced by Canada. Bloomberg: <http://bloom.bg/1nf49gU>

— GM engineer Jim Federico, who led the automaker's ignition switch analysis in 2012, is retiring. Automotive News: <http://bit.ly/1rWxj21>

— Metro shifts track work shutdowns to midnight on Fridays (instead of 10pm) starting in July. WaPo: <http://wapo.st/1sels1e>

— “Clock ticking on Hudson crossings, Amtrak warns,” from Capital New York's Dana Rubenstein: <http://politico.pro/1kPE8Bq>

— Tesla hit with \$89,000 in fines for safety violations after molten aluminum spilled on three workers. San Jose Mercury News: <http://bit.ly/1njqE1N> (h/t Bob King)

— Crossroads Strategies registers to lobby for the “I-69 Mid-Continent Highway Coalition, Inc.” Lobbying disclosure form: <http://1.usa.gov/1jvnHKX> (h/t Byron Tau)

— 4,000 gallons of diesel fuel spill from a train in Wisconsin. Journal Times: <http://bit.ly/1ijIAUI>

THE COUNTDOWN: MAP-21 expires and DOT funding runs out in 148 days. FAA policy is up in 513 days. The mid-term elections are in 182 days and the 2016 presidential election is in 917 days.

CABOOSE — How to lock your bike: Knowing how to properly lock up your bike in a big city can be an invaluable skill — especially if you like keeping the bike intact for longer than a few weeks. Hal Ruzal, a bike mechanic at Bicycle Habitat in Manhattan, is a legend for grading people on their bike-lock jobs (Rule #1: Locking to scaffolding is an automatic ‘F’). See the newest installment of a fun video series featuring Ruzal, via the Atlantic Cities: <http://bit.ly/Su5aoJ>