

June 29, 2012

Statement on the federal transportation reauthorization

The Metropolitan Planning Council supports H.R. 4348, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), the federal transportation reauthorization conference report. Congress will vote on the legislation today.

The nation has not had a long-term federal transportation bill in more than two years. With the ninth extension of SAFETEA-LU set to expire tomorrow, June 30, and no plan to replace declining gas tax revenues that fund the nation's transportation system, the alternative to MAP-21 would have been disastrous for metropolitan Chicago and the nation. Simply passing another extension would have meant cutting transportation investments by more than 30 percent -- the difference between what the Highway Trust Fund is collecting from gas taxes and what is authorized under current law -- and creating an uncertain federal funding outlook for regions, hamstringing their ability to plan transportation programs for the long term and limiting agencies bonding capabilities.

The conference report is also a major step forward from the House plan, H.R. 7, which would have decimated guaranteed funding for public transit, taken away local control of planning, and deeply cut bike, pedestrian and air quality mitigation programs. Under H.R. 7 the Chicago region would have lost up to \$1.2 billion over the next five years, including major cuts to public transit and the Illinois Dept. of Transportation.

The benefits of MAP-21 will be felt across the nation and especially in the Chicago region. Illinois highways and transit systems will get a small boost in funding. Further, changes to how capital dollars are allocated could bring in sizable funding for major capital projects, such as the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) Red Line extension and the CREATE freight transportation enhancement program. The bill offers a stable source of revenue for the next 27 months and will create 3 million jobs across the country. Because of these benefits, MPC supports passage of the conference report into law.

However, MPC believes Congress missed an opportunity to make significant policy changes. While MAP-21 increases funding for the successful federal TIFIA program, which provides direct loans, loan guarantees, and lines of credit to surface transportation projects at favorable terms, the Conference Committee modified the TIFIA project selection criteria to a first-come, first-served basis from one that is competitive. It is not clear why this change was made, but given the success of the current TIFIA prioritization process, it should be reinstated.

MPC is encouraged that, for the first time ever, the bill would require the establishment of national goals, performance measures, and accountability in planning and funding transportation investments. Regrettably there is no formal role for transit agencies, metropolitan planning organizations, or local governments to work with state departments of transportation to develop these metrics.

Additional oversights not in the bill include the following:

- The bill does not reauthorize the Express Lanes Demonstration Program or existing capacity pilot programs that permit tolling on select highways to manage traffic congestion and reduce emissions.
- The bill moves away from a fix-it-first strategy, even though maintaining existing infrastructure investments ought to be job number one, ahead of building costly new highways.

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- Bicycle and pedestrian programs that are cost-effective and provide people with healthy, safe, environmentally friendly, and affordable transportation options would be cut under the new law.
- An important benefit for transit riders – parity between pre-tax benefits for people who commute via transit and pre-tax benefits for people who drive to work – also was left out of this bill.

MPC will work with Congress and our partners over the next 27 months to implement these policy changes in the next reauthorization.