



Transportation Friday

An electronic newsletter concerning regional transportation issues

Friday, April 6th, 2018

Volume 26, Number 1

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There will be a Mobile MPO meeting on May 23rd, TCC/CAC and BPAC will be May 2nd; please mark your calendars. Both the State and the Mobile Urban Area TAP (Transportation Alternatives Program) Funding have been announced, and are both due May 1, 2018; There is also some transit planning funding available; please see *Funding Opportunities*. In *Legislative Updates* we are talking Omnibus; *Just For Fun* goes golfing and *In The News* we are talking Amtrak (*interesting take from two articles, from two states*).

Have a great weekend!

Check out [ALGO Traffic](#) before you travel!

Anthony Johnson, Monica Williamson, Tom Piper, and Kevin Harrison, PTP

www.mobilempo.org  check us out on FACEBOOK

Mobile MPO Updates

Please see Funding Opportunities below for the Mobile Urbanized Area TAP Funding announcement

MEETINGS ANNOUNCED

The Mobile MPO will meet on May 23rd, and the TCC/CAC Advisory Committee and the BPAC for the Mobile MPO will meet on May 2.

There are several items on the agenda. The Long Range Transportation Plan needs to be modified to accurately portray the I-10 Mobile River Bridge in terms of a considered toll, environmental justice considerations, and the bicycle/pedestrian component. Also, we will be discussing a draft 2019 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), and there are some revisions to the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Finally, we will be continuing our discussion of performance measures, and we must adopt a resolution supporting a Transit Asset Management performance measure for the WAVE transit.

NEW SARPC Transportation Video



[HERE](#)

Want to know what other SARPC departments do?

- [Planning and Community Development](#)
- [Area Agency on Aging](#)
- [Employment and Economic Development](#)

US 45 Feasibility Study

SARPC staff has met with Volkert and CERM as the kick off and introductory meeting to the project. Public participation is important for this project, so we expect our stakeholders to be heavily involved. Volkert and SARPC staff are currently compiling data for the project. SARPC, Volkert and CERM have finalized the Advisory Committee, and we will be meeting at 6:30 PM on April 17th. If you are interested in serving on the Advisory Committee, please contact Kevin Harrison.

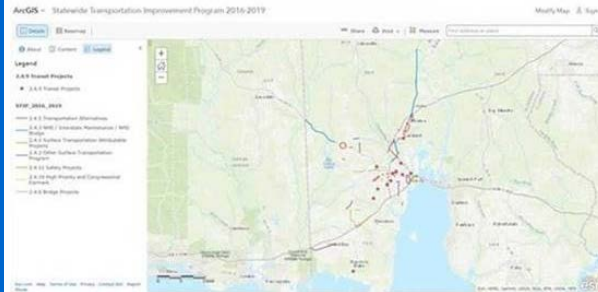
TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP) NOW ONLINE

The TIP represents a four year program (2016-2019) for improvements in the various transportation systems located within the Mobile study area as identified in the Mobile MPO's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), the twenty-five year plan for the Mobile Urban area

[Destination 2040](#). The LRTP establishes the transportation programs that are needed to meet travel demand by the study year and study area. LRTP projects that become funded are moved into the TIP and submitted to the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT), where they are programmed into the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). For MPO projects, TIP project selection is based on priorities established by MPO member governments and the availability of funds through the Surface Transportation Attributable program. For other projects, ALDOT has discretion of project funding based on availability of funds from various types of funding categories. Most often, projects in the TIP are derived from the LRTP. The TIP guides ALDOT in its annual allocation of funds for transportation improvements and becomes a part of the STIP.

ArcGIS Online is now being utilized by MPO staff to map all federally funded surface transportation projects within our area. Check it out.

2016-2019 E-TIP [HERE](#)



Mobile MPO 101

Here are a couple of great videos that were produced by our counterpart in Birmingham (Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham). The videos are a summary of the MPO planning process and are below:



Funding a Project with an MPO: <https://vimeo.com/210829210>



Inside an MPO: <https://vimeo.com/210825997>

[HERE](#) are the slides and presentations of the Mobile MPO 101 training.

Stay UP To Date on the Mobile River Bridge and Bayway Project: <http://mobileriverbridge.com/>

This critically important, high-priority transportation project will involve constructing a new six-lane bridge across the Mobile River to increase Interstate 10's capacity and replace the existing four-lane Bayway with an eight-lane facility at an elevation above the 100 year storm surge event to reduce traffic headaches for thousands of commuters each day by saving motorists time.

The Wallace Tunnel currently averages 75,000 vehicles per day, reaching up to 100,000 vehicles during the peak tourism season. With almost double the daily traffic originally anticipated for the crossing, heavy congestions and longer travel times impact motorists, businesses, and the quality of life in the region. ALDOT expects this project to:

- **Reduce travel time between Mobile and Spanish Fort/Daphne.**
- **Increase reliability in travel times and accessibility to jobs, educational facilities, medical services, and recreational activities.**
- **Facilitate access to/from major industries and freight destinations in Mobile and Baldwin Counties and provide hazardous material vehicles a direct route away from the downtown district.**
- **Take all efforts to preserve and protect the Mobile Bay so that generations to come can enjoy the view and natural beauty from the bridge.**

Hyperlinks within the advisory:

Mobile River Bridge and Bayway Project: <http://mobileriverbridge.com/>

ALDOT's mission is to provide a safe, efficient, environmentally and economically sound transportation network across Alabama. For further information, visit www.dot.state.al.us.

Recent Scheduling Changes This Week for Mobile

The target start date or project engineers estimated amount has changed for the following :

Project : 100049566 (CN)
Federal aid number : BR 0016 (522)
County : MOBILE
Project Description : REPLACE BRIDGE, BIN 008714, SR-16 (US-90) WESTBOUND OVER TENSAW-SPANISH RIVER. (SUFF=49.7, STATUS=SD)
Old Engineers Estimate : \$19,062,500.00
New Engineers Estimate : \$24,595,731.22

Region Let March 30th, 2018

ESCAMBIA COUNTY

- For constructing the Planing, Resurfacing, Bridge Rail Retrofit, and Traffic Stripe on I-65 from the Baldwin County Line to the SR-21 Interchange in Atmore. Length 9.722 mi. The Bracket Estimate on this project is from \$5,420,284 to \$6,624,791.
- For constructing the Permanent Restoration (Ditch Failure Repair) on SR-3 (US-31) from the junction of Sardis Church Road to east of the junction of CR-2 (Old Atmore Road) west of Flomaton. Length 0.084 mi. The Bracket Estimate on this project is from \$641,270 to \$783,774 .

MOBILE COUNTY

- For constructing the Planing, Resurfacing, and Traffic Stripe on SR-13 (US-43) from the Cedar Creek Bridge south of Mt Vernon to the Washington County Line. Length 5.607 mi. The Bracket Estimate on this project is from \$1,516,659 to \$1,853,694.
- For constructing the Planing, Resurfacing, and Traffic Stripe on SR-13 (US-43) from the Cold Creek Bridge north of LeMoyne to the Cedar Creek Bridge south of Mt Vernon. Length 6.936 mi.

BALDWIN COUNTY

- For constructing the Resurfacing and Roadway Extension (Grading, Drainage, Pavement, Signals, and Traffic Stripe) on Fern Avenue from the junction of Airport Drive in Foley to the Foley Beach Express. Length 3.365 mi. The Bracket Estimate on this project is from \$3,298,978 to \$4,032,084 .

[What's Under Construction?](#)

[Project Status](#)

Legislative Updates

Trump Uses Ohio Visit to Tout Infrastructure Plan

President Trump visited Richfield, Ohio, March 29 to talk up his infrastructure investment ideas, as part of an administration effort to build momentum for his plan to invest \$200 billion in new federal funds over a decade to spur more than \$1.5 trillion in total project spending.



He spoke at a union worker training center in the town located between Cleveland and Akron, accompanied by U.S. Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao and Labor Secretary Alex Acosta. Trump told the audience that Congress would probably wait until after the mid-term elections in November before lawmakers would act on major infrastructure legislation.

"It can be passed in one bill or in a series of measures," he said. "What matters is that we get the job done."

The president's remarks echoed those of some congressional leaders who have said Congress will act this year on aviation and water projects bills, and can use those to address some of the infrastructure investment aspirations. Congress also just passed, and Trump signed, a fiscal 2018 appropriations bill that [funnels more funds into transportation](#) and other types of infrastructure, in the first such measure under a two-year agreement to hike federal project spending this year and in 2019. Trump also touted his administration's efforts to speed up federal permitting of infrastructure projects, to move them faster into the construction phase and generate their economic and mobility benefits sooner. While Trump was giving a speech that ranged far beyond infrastructure issues, the White House [released a new fact sheet](#) that listed highlights from his proposal.

Those include using \$100 billion over 10 years in an incentives program to entice additional investment from states, localities and the private sector, and \$50 billion in a rural infrastructure program that would mostly go through state-directed block grants. Various

transportation stakeholder groups, including the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, have said that Congress in any major infrastructure legislation should also dedicate enough new revenue to close a looming long-term investment gap for the Highway Trust Fund.

How the Omnibus Bill Positively Impacts Asphalt Contractors

Under the FY18 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, total federal infrastructure spending is up \$7B in the asphalt pavement market alone.

[JESSICA LOMBARDO](#)

APRIL 3, 2018

The \$1.3 trillion omnibus appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18) will significantly boost Federal highway dollars this construction season, positively impacting the asphalt pavement markets. However, many contractors are not sure what that means for them at the state level.

A recent National Asphalt Pavement Association (NAPA) webinar investigated just how much money the asphalt industry will be receiving, who can spend it and what it can be spent on.

Funding Background

While the FAST Act establishes and authorizes spending for the core highway program, giving states certainty for federal funding long-term (2015-2020), a transportation appropriations bill is established every year by Congress.

Under an appropriations bill, states' receive notice from FHWA detailing how much funding they will have available to enter into new contracts for highway projects and then transportation agencies bid work and enter into contracts knowing FHWA will reimburse the states.

"I expect notice going out to the states to take three to four weeks based on this legislation that was enacted just weeks ago," Jay Hansen, executive vice president at NAPA says.

The "Agreement"

Congress struggled to approve the FY18 appropriation bills in the absence of a budget deal setting overall spending levels for domestic and defense programs, but once they reached an agreement to boost defense spending, other agreements could be reached.

"The agreement was basically to lift the budget caps so there was room in the budget to spend on all these various programs," Hansen says.

The mammoth two-year (2018-2019) budget deal agreed February 8, 2018 said:

- \$164B increase for defense
- \$89B for TX, LA, FL, PR and VI hurricane relief and wildfires
- \$131B increase in non-defense programs
- \$20B added to infrastructure meaning "programs related to rural water and wastewater, drinking water, rural broadband, energy, innovative capital projects, and surface transportation."

That means the agreement allots \$10B per year to places that are not necessarily the roads and bridges that relate to what infrastructure really means in our industry.

Omnibus Funds Asphalt

The FY18 Omnibus Appropriations bill funds all government programs through September 30, 2018 and appropriations committee members determine how much of the \$20B allotted for "infrastructure" is allocated to highways.

The core Federal-Aid Highway program received \$43.3B in 2017. The FAST Act assumed a \$900M increase in federal-aid highway funding in 2018 and Congress honored that increase, bringing the total federal highway fiscal year spend for 2018 to \$44.23B.

Starting this year, the appropriations committee also enacted a general bonus fund giving \$2.53B to highway programs. That means there is an additional \$3.46B to spend on our roads in 2018. But where will that general fund money be allocated? FY18Omnibus Appropriations Bill

Surface Trans Block Grants: \$1.98 billion
Puerto Rico Highways: \$15.8 million
Other Territories: \$4.2 million
Federal Lands/Tribal: \$300 million
New Bridge Program: \$225 million
TOTAL: \$2,525,000,000

The Surface Transportation Block Grant program is a core FHWA program and the money goes to state DOTs and mayors, giving \$1.98B directly to our market.

Some of the additional funds are allocated to rebuild after disasters in Puerto Rico and other territories over and above the \$739M Congress allocates yearly for emergency relief. Hansen says the other two allocated amounts for Federal Lands and the New Bridge Program will not directly impact the asphalt market.

Surface Transportation Block Grant Program

Under this FHWA core highway program, states will be seeing \$1.98B from the general fund directly allocated to their State DOT. Roughly 53% of that money is then sub-allocated to metro areas but the appropriations committee says that the money must be spent on construction of highways, bridges and tunnels.

“What we’ve learned from other webinars is that when the states get the money, they tend to spend it on highways,” Hansen says. “If the Mayor gets the money, they will divert more of the money into transit and livability programs. How the money will be spent is really up to the industry and the state asphalt pavement associations and their colleagues to make sure that when money goes to the cities, the money is spent on its intended purpose.” Continue [HERE](#).

Public Transit: Why gov’t is short-sighted to invest in a dying transportation form

[Dr. Daniel Sutter](#) Yellowhammer News

The first driverless car pedestrian fatality occurred recently in Arizona, almost two years after the first fatal crash. These tragic fatalities signal the ongoing development of this technology. Cars and trucks with drivers killed 5,800 pedestrians in 2016, so a driverless car pedestrian fatality was probably inevitable.

Driverless cars will reshape our economy, as 2.8 million people currently work in transportation. One area of disruption which has flown under the radar is public transportation. A new Cato Institute study, “The Coming Transit Apocalypse,” highlights the looming wreck.

How can we be sure that driverless vehicles will be on the road soon? Nothing is certain in life, but the Cato study notes that more than three dozen companies worldwide are experimenting with the technology, including auto makers, auto parts suppliers, and tech companies. Thus many companies believe that practical self-driving vehicles are within reach. Given that these companies are trying different approaches, it seems likely that at least one successful design will emerge.

Public transportation is already hemorrhaging riders, with a 3 percent decline in the first half of 2017 following a 4.4 percent decline between 2014 and 2016. Seven metro transit systems have seen ridership declines of at least 27 percent since 2009. Although lower gas prices partly explain this, ride sharing services like Uber and Lyft are also having an impact. Ride sharing offers greater convenience than transit with door-to-door, on-demand service, but is currently more expensive. Driverless, shared vehicles are projected to be price competitive with transit. Consequently, the Cato study contends that public transit will be “extinct” everywhere outside of New York City and perhaps a couple of other markets by 2030.

Mass transit has never been very popular since the widespread ownership of cars, and currently carries less than one percent of travelers in all but a few cities. One disadvantage of mass transit is geography: residents and jobs are too spread out in most American cities to generate high enough demand for either buses or trains on centralized routes. Culture also plays a factor, as many Americans simply prefer driving.

Low ridership rates are not due to a lack of government spending, which has exceeded \$1 trillion (adjusted for inflation) since 1970. Fares cover only about 30 percent of expenditures. Americans will not use even highly subsidized public transport.

Many transit agencies have deferred maintenance on rail systems, which have a useful life of about 30 years before requiring substantial rebuilding. Washington’s Metro system turned 30 in 2006, and by 2013, incidents of smoke in tunnels were causing evacuations twice a month. Unreliable service makes transit less competitive with ride sharing going forward.

An end of public transport, however, will not end taxpayers’ costs. Many systems went into debt building or repairing subway or rail lines, while others have significant unfunded health care and pension liabilities. For example, the Cato study estimates that Boston’s transit system has \$3.4 billion in unfunded liabilities, which represent a portion of employees’ compensation. Transit systems have spent lavishly on new rail lines instead of ensuring that promises to employees will be kept. Continue [HERE](#)

Funding Opportunities

Transit Planning Funding

[CTAA announces the availability of funding for inclusive planning projects](#)

The Community Transportation Association along with its partners the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging and the Institute for Community Inclusion of the University of Massachusetts-Boston is pleased to announce the availability of a new round of funding for local inclusive planning projects. CTAA, with financial support from the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living, and in collaboration with other federal and national partners, is making available grants of up to \$35,000 each for up to 20 organizations for a six-month period. The new projects are expected to adopt inclusive strategies that fit their communities and build upon learning from previous projects. It is anticipated that the experience from these grants will add to the knowledge garnered from previous project and help to build recognition and support for inclusive planning across the U.S.

[To learn more about the grants and to apply, download the grant application package here.](#) (PDF)

The mission of this project, sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Community Living (ACL) in collaboration with the Department of Transportation’s Federal Transit Administration, is to demonstrate the value that inclusive processes can bring to coordinated transportation efforts.

We are developing, testing, and demonstrating ways to empower people with disabilities and older adults to be actively involved in designing and implementing coordinated transportation systems. The project’s goal is to support communities nationwide in adopting proven, sustainable, scalable, and replicable models that include participation of people with disabilities and older adults in the design and implementation of coordinated transportation systems that are responsive to their needs. To date, the project has funded [25 demonstration programs](#) and compiled a wealth of information and resources on the inclusive planning process.

For questions about the project, contact project director Charles Dickson at dickson@ctaa.org.

[ACL Inclusive Planning Project Round Four Grantees: Case Studies](#)

Our eight 2016-17 projects across the country demonstrated different approaches to inclusive planning. [Read here about each project’s approach, lessons learned, and accomplishments.](#)

Mobile Urban Area Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Funding Availability Announcement

The Mobile MPO has announced the availability of the Fiscal Year 2019 Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funding. The maximum amount that can be applied for per project with Mobile Urbanized TAP funds is \$200,000 (federal). Applicants are welcome to submit more than one project.

The TAP provides funding for programs and projects defined as transportation alternatives, including on- and off-road pedestrian and bicycle facilities, infrastructure projects for improving non-driver access to public transportation and enhanced mobility, community improvement activities, and environmental mitigation; recreational trail program projects; safe routes to school projects; and projects for planning, designing, or constructing boulevards and other roadways largely in the right-of-way of former Interstate System routes or other divided highways.

This year applications will only be accepted electronically. Applicants should email their complete application to transportation@sarpc.org.

Applications are due to the Transportation Planning Department of the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission (SARPC) no later than 12:00 p.m., Tuesday, May 1, 2018.

Electronic versions of the applications are available online at:
<https://mobilempo.org/TransportationAlternatives.html>.

Project budgets should be itemized and completed by a Professional Engineer that is certified by the State of Alabama.

If you have any questions please call the SARPC Transportation Planning Department at (251) 433 6541.

The Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) is soliciting applications for the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) for FY 2019.

There are several changes to the State's TAP application and instructions this year. Application information packets were mailed out to city and county agencies this week.

The deadline for submission of FY 2018 TAP applications including support documentation is Tuesday, May 1, 2018 at 5:00 p.m.

Please contact Tina Milton at (334) 353-6441 (miltont@dot.state.al.us) if you have questions regarding this matter.

Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant programs

Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Program (FY 2017)

CRISI program: Applications are due no later than *5:00 p.m. EDT, June 21, 2018*.

More information on FRA's CRISI website: <https://www.fra.dot.gov/Page/P1079>

Overview: This program will fund projects that improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of passenger and freight rail. See the [FY 2017 Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) for more information.

Legislative Authority: This program was authorized in Section 11301 of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, Pub. L. 114-94 (2015); 49 U.S.C. § 24407. Funding under this program was made available by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017, Public Law No. 115-31, Division K, Title I. **Amount:** \$65,232,400

Restoration and Enhancement Grants Program (FY 2017)

REG program: Applications are due no later than *5:00 p.m. EDT May 22, 2018*.

More information on FRA's REG website: <https://www.fra.dot.gov/Page/P1081>

Overview: This program will fund operating assistance grants for initiating, restoring, or enhancing intercity rail passenger transportation. See the [FY 2017 Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) for more information.

Legislative Authority: This program was authorized in Section 11303 of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, Pub. L. No. 114-94 (2015); 49 U.S.C. § 24408. Funding under this program was made available by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017, Public Law No. 115-31, Division K, Title I. **Amount:** \$4,796,500

Section 5307, 5310, and 5311: Using Non-DOT Funds for Local Match

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) [Administration for Community Living](#) (ACL) has worked with the [National Aging and Disability Transportation Center](#) to clarify the ability of grantees to use Older Americans Act Title IIIB Supportive Services Funds to match Federal Transit Administration (FTA) programs. These FTA programs include Urbanized Area Formula Grants (Section 5307), Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and People with Disabilities (Section 5310), and Formula Grants for Rural Areas (Section 5311). This information has been publicized [HERE](#).

FHWA Offers New Funding for Innovative Demonstration Projects

New funding is available from the Federal Highway Administration's Accelerated Innovation Deployment Demonstration program to encourage the transportation community to adopt proven innovations. [Funding](#) or the AID Demonstration program, launched in 2014 as part of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act, was continued by the 2015 [Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act](#). Since AID Demonstration was introduced, FHWA has provided more than \$43 million for 61 awards.

Under the program, funding of up to \$1 million may be awarded for projects that use proven innovations in any project phase, including planning, financing, operation, structures, materials, pavements, environment and construction. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis through Grants.gov, the federal government's website for information on funding opportunities. For more information on the AID Demonstration program, contact [Ewa Flom](#) of the FHWA Center for Accelerating Innovation.

The FHWA continues the Accelerated Innovation Deployment (AID) Demonstration authorized within the Technology and Innovation Deployment Program (TIDP) under the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. The AID Demonstration provides incentive funding for any project activities eligible for assistance under title 23, U.S.C. in any phase of a highway transportation project between project planning and project delivery including planning, financing, operation, structures, materials, pavements, environment, and construction that address the TIDP goals. The Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) published on September 1, 2016

(<https://federalregister.gov/a/2016-21063>) requests grant applications and provides selection criteria, application requirements, and technical assistance with Grants.gov during the grant solicitation period.

Link to Additional Information: [FHWA Center for Accelerating Innovation Grants page](#)

Industrial Access Road and Bridge

Industrial access funds are intended to provide adequate public access to new or expanding distribution, manufacturing and industrial firms. The industry must be committed to new investment and the creation of new jobs. The new access must be on public right of way for public use (state, city or county) and the project sponsor (city or county) must maintain the completed facility unless the facility consists of turn lanes, crossovers, etc., that are located on state highways. Industrial access funds are limited to construction, construction engineering and inspection costs. The project sponsor is responsible for all preliminary engineering, right-of-way acquisition and utility relocation costs.

Prior to the date the qualifying (new or expanding) project is "placed in service," the sponsoring entity or its local development agency must notify the Alabama Department of Commerce of its intent to claim the incentives under Section 41-9-202.1, Code of Alabama 1975. Effective October 9, 2008, the Industrial Access Road and Bridge Corporation application submittal should include the notification acknowledgment letter from the Secretary of Commerce. For more info, see [HERE](#)

To stay up to date on all of the many grants that are available click [HERE](#) or type www.grants.gov in your browser.

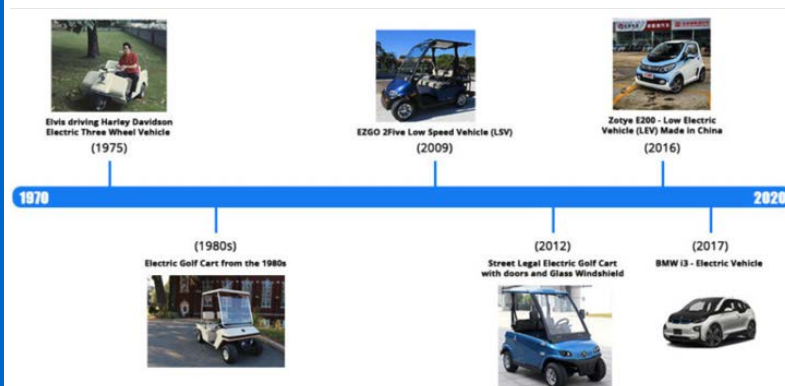
Just For Fun

Just FORE fun!!!



It's the Masters Golf Tournament this weekend, so you can't really say that there is nothing on TV. There's nothing more entertaining than watching grown men hit a little white ball, then chase it. If the ball accidentally goes in the sand, that is real excitement. So let's talk about golf, and the vehicles that are attributed to the sport. What is the impact of the Golf Cart on transportation?

The golf cart first appeared in the United States in 1932 in Texarkana. Since that time, there has been an evolution of the golf cart [HERE](#)



JUST FOR FUN, [Check out the luckiest golf shots on the planet.](#)

In the News

In Alabama, decisions loom on state's role in Amtrak's return to Gulf Coast

Updated Apr 4; Posted Apr 4

By [John Sharp](#)

jsharp@al.com

To bring Amtrak back to Mobile, state officials will have to dedicate \$3.5 million over the course of four years to match federal grants aimed at improving an existing rail line.

And to return service to Atmore -- Amtrak's only other stop on the old Gulf Coast route - the state's cost rises by another \$8.5 million.

Deadlines for the state's decision are fast approaching. Applications for two federal grants, funded by the fiscal year 2018 omnibus appropriations bill and requiring state matches, are due in May and June.

If the state takes a pass, it risks losing out on a restored Gulf Coast passenger rail service. The route would run between New Orleans and Pascagoula, Mississippi, serving various cities along the way.

"There are grants available right now that Alabama can take advantage of," said Wiley Blankenship, CEO of the Coastal Alabama Partnership who serves as Mobile's city representative on the [Southern Rail Commission](#). The SRC is a 21-member group formed in 1982 to advocate for passenger rail service and pursue funding opportunities to support its mission.

He added, "We'll be having our conversations with lawmakers and with the governor to get us in the loop." The goal, he said, is to "take advantage of those dollars."

Looming response

Also hanging in the balance is the potential to extend passenger rail out of Mobile north toward Montgomery and Birmingham. Studies have been under way for some time into the possible revival of the Gulf Breeze line, which served Alabama from 1989-1995.



[Alabama cities jockey for Amtrak's attention](#)

[Studies are ongoing to revive Amtrak service from Mobile north to Birmingham. The federally-backed analysis of restoring a Gulf Coast route is also in the works. Huntsville wants in on the act, as city officials recently pleaded with the Southern Rail Commission to have the Rocket City included into the Amtrak study mix.](#)

If the state isn't on board with the New Orleans connection, the northward route is probably sidetracked, too. Gov. Kay Ivey's administration is expected to receive updates on the situation in the coming weeks. The restoration of the Gulf Coast line has been a years-long dream for some. The Sunset Limited - journeying between Los Angeles and Miami -- was the last Amtrak train to roll through Mobile. But it became a slowly fading memory after Hurricane Katrina blasted and wrecked the rail lines in 2005. Much of the line, today, is owned and operated by freight hauler CSX. Greg White, vice chairman of the Southern Rail Commission, who lives in Andalusia, said he's confident that the SRC can bring Ivey's office "up-to-speed" on the urgency of moving forward.

In Mississippi, which has four potential stops along the Gulf Coast line, and Louisiana - which covets restoring passenger rail from New Orleans north to Baton Rouge - [top-level office-holders ardently back Amtrak's return, pledging to find the necessary dollars.](#)

Continue [HERE](#)

Amtrak Gulf Coast service to Pensacola back on track

Jim Little, jwittle@pnj.com Published 3:50 p.m. CT March 26, 2018 | Updated 4:37 p.m. CT March 26, 2018

Buried in the \$1.3 trillion omnibus bill that kept the government open through September and was signed by President Donald Trump on Friday is a bit of hope for those wanting to see passenger rail service return to the Gulf Coast — including to Pensacola.

The law contains \$20 million for a grant program aimed at initiating, restoring or enhancing passenger rail service, according to Bryan Gulley, a Senate Commerce Committee spokesman for Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla.

"The program, which Florida Sen. Bill Nelson helped establish in 2015, is competitive but it was created with the Gulf Coast service in mind," Gulley said in an email to the News Journal. "For example, the grant program gives priority to restoring service on routes formerly operated by Amtrak. So, if the Gulf Coast line gets approval, the grant money could be used to help restore the line."

The bill also includes \$592 million for the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements grant program, which contains \$35.5 million to restore lost passenger service, according to the Southern Rail Commission.

More: [Amtrak co-CEO optimistic about restoring service to Gulf Coast](#)

Gulley said Sen. Nelson remains hopeful that progress will continue to be made on the project to restore passenger service to the Florida Gulf Coast.

Gulf Coast Rail Service Working Group, a partnership between the Federal Railroad Administration, Southern Rail Commission and 28 cities, regional planning councils and state departments of transportation including Florida, [released a report to Congress in July](#) urging the implantation of daily round-trip Amtrak service between New Orleans and Orlando.

The working group estimated the cost to restore the service at approximately \$115 million, but CSX disputed that amount, saying it would instead cost \$2 billion. The working group said it could not validate CSX's estimate without knowing the methodology behind the estimate.

CSX told the News Journal in an email that the company is selling two rail lines in the Panhandle, one from Jacksonville to Chattahoochee and the other from Chattahoochee to Pensacola.

"The decision to sell these lines was based on an ongoing evaluation of CSX's network, operations and assets to ensure they're delivering

value that meets the company's long-term business needs," the CSX email said. "...Throughout this process, CSX is communicating with customers, union representatives and employees impacted by the potential sales, and we're committed to working closely with regulatory agencies reviewing and approving the transactions."

Knox Ross, vice chairman of the Southern Rail Commission, said the sale could help the effort to restore passenger service to Florida.

"(State and federal regulators) could make the passenger train a condition of sale," Ross said. "That they have to maintain the line to at least current standard, and that they have to allow the (passenger) train."

Ross said the Southern Rail Commission is trying to get twice-daily rail service between New Orleans and Mobile, Alabama, that he said will help the effort to restore passenger service to the rest of the Gulf Coast.

More: [Restore Amtrak to Gulf Coast, Gulf Coast Working Group report says](#)

"We've got a short-term opportunity to get something done," Ross said.

Restoration of the full New Orleans to Orlando route will be more difficult, with federal regulations requiring new safety technology known as positive train control to be installed along passenger service route.

Ross said most of the line from Pensacola to Orlando doesn't have positive train control.

Nelson's office said they secured funding for a \$250 million program to award grants to install new positive control systems, which could be used for the restoration of the route.

Ross said the effort to revive the route began with people calling their elected leaders and asking for it to come back, and he said if people still want to see it come back, they should keep calling their leaders.

"If people think it's important, then they should let their elected representatives know it," Ross said.

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Emissions standards are changing, what that means for your vehicle

Posted: Apr 02, 2018 4:59 PM CDT

Updated: Apr 02, 2018 4:59 PM CDT

Spencer Ernst, Digital Producer, MeredithCONNECT

(AP/Meredith) -- Environmental regulators announced on Monday they will ease emissions standards for cars and trucks, saying that a timeline put in place by President Barack Obama was not appropriate and set standards "too high."

The Environmental Protection Agency said it completed a review that will affect vehicles for model years 2022-2025 but it did not provide details on new standards, which it said would be forthcoming. Current regulations from the EPA require the fleet of new vehicles to get 36 miles per gallon in real-world driving by 2025. That's about 10 mpg over the existing standard.

The agency said in its decision that the regulations set under the Obama administration "presents challenges for auto manufacturers due to feasibility and practicability, raises potential concerns related to automobile safety, and results in significant additional costs on consumers, especially low-income consumers."

The EPA, in partnership with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, will work to come up with new standards.

Automakers applauded Monday's decision, arguing that the current requirements would have cost the industry billions of dollars and raised vehicle prices due to the cost of developing the necessary technology.

"This was the right decision, and we support the Administration for pursuing a data-driven effort and a single national program as it works to finalize future standards," said Gloria Bergquist, vice president, communications and public affairs for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, in a statement. "We appreciate that the Administration is working to find a way to both increase fuel economy standards and keep new vehicles affordable to more Americans."

Environmentalists, meanwhile, warned the proposed rollbacks will make U.S. cars more expensive to fill up.

"No one in America is eager to buy a car that gets worse gas mileage and spews more pollution from its tailpipe," said Fred Krupp, president of the Environmental Defense Fund. "Designing and building cleaner, more cost-efficient cars is what helped automakers bounce back from the depths of the recession and will be key to America's global competitiveness in the years ahead."

Any change is likely to set up a lengthy legal showdown with California, which has the power to set its own pollution and gas mileage standards and doesn't want them to change. About a dozen other states follow California's rules, and together they account for more than one-third of the vehicles sold in the U.S. Currently the federal and California standards are the same.

Some conservative groups are pressing EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt to get rid of the waiver. Pruitt said in a statement Monday that the agency will work with all states, including California, to finalize new standards.

"Cooperative federalism doesn't mean that one state can dictate standards for the rest of the country," he said. "EPA will set a national standard for greenhouse gas emissions that allows auto manufacturers to make cars that people both want and can afford — while still expanding environmental and safety benefits of newer cars."

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra said his team is reviewing the EPA's determination and working closely with the California Air Resources Board.

"We're ready to file suit if needed to protect these critical standards and to fight the Administration's war on our environment," Becerra

said in a statement. "California didn't become the sixth-largest economy in the world by spectating."

Sen. Edward J. Markey said the existing standards are "technically feasible and economically achievable," and added that he would use every legislative tool to block the moves.

"Slashing these standards would amount to turning the keys to our energy policy over to Big Oil and the auto industry," said the Massachusetts Democrat, who is a member of the Environment and Public Works Committee and chair of the Senate Climate Task Force.

According to Markey, the standards are projected to save nearly 2.5 million barrels of oil a day by 2030, around as much oil as is imported from OPEC countries every day.

Landscaping, signage changes coming to Baldwin County Megasite



Posted Friday, April 6, 2018 9:21 am

By **Cliff McCollum**

Landscaping and signage changes will be coming soon to the Baldwin County Megasite, after county commissioners unanimously approved a proposal to make the long sought after changes on Tuesday.

Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance President Lee Lawson said he felt it was finally time to pull the trigger on the landscaping changes after several years of discussion and planning.

"We've been down this road several times in the last four years I've been here," Lawson said. "Every time we get close to redesigning, we get an active project looking at coming through."

Changes include a landscaping redesign that will clear several trees, including the palm trees located at the site's entrance, and the installation of new signage - a 8-by-16 double-sided sign whose top end will sit about 20 feet in the air.

Lawson said the changes should help the site look more attractive from the road for potential business partners and Baldwin County residents alike, but added that the continued relationship building done by the BCEDA and county leaders was what would really help bring business partners to see the site.

"Every project that is brought us or that we have developed has been because of relationships made with industry leaders and site consultants," Lawson said. "They don't come to us because they're driving down 287 and see the site. It just doesn't happen that way."

Lawson said BCEDA has worked with the county and ALDOT to get all of the necessary permits and approvals for the project and hopes to begin the changes soon.

"We think you'll be happy with the finished product," Lawson said.

Lawson said that multiple organizations were helping with the funding for the changes, not just the county commission.

Baldwin County Commission Chairman Frank Burt said he was glad to see progress being made at the Megasite and hoped the changes would be finished soon.

"I look forward to that day," Burt said.

\$9.7 Million for Mobile Greenway Initiative



[Sandy Stimpson](#)

19 hrs ·

Have you checked out the first phase of the Mobile Greenway yet at Tricentennial Park? The Alabama Restore Council recently awarded the [City of Mobile](#) \$9.7 million to extend this recreation path for runners, walkers and cyclists from the University of South Alabama to Mobile Bay. [#ecomobile](#) [#earthmonth](#)



THE BREAKDOWN

- \$9.7 MILLION PROJECT.
- ESTABLISHES RECREATION PATH FOR RUNNERS, WALKERS AND CYCLISTS ALONG THREE MILE CREEK.
- TWELVE-MILE GREENWAY WILL STRETCH FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA TO MOBILE BAY.
- RESTORES THREE MILE CREEK TO ITS HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE.
- ENCOURAGES FITNESS, BEAUTIFIES A VITAL WATERWAY AND EDUCATES CITIZENS.

Transportation Research

NEW! AASHTO LRFD Bridge Design Specifications, 8th Edition

Check out this video for details about the new 8th edition of the *LRFD Bridge Design Specifications*, including information on the major updates that have been made to the Specifications since the 2014 7th edition.

For more information or to purchase a copy, visit the AASHTO Bookstore online at <https://bookstore.transportation.org>, and search by the item code, LRFD-8.



Bicycle Safety Survey

ALDOT is conducting a research project "Comprehensive Investigation of Bike Crash Causes, Patterns and Countermeasures in Alabama". Please help us share this link to participants (both drivers and bicyclists). This survey is being conducted by the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) on behalf of the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT). The main objective of this survey is to identify the status of drivers' and bicyclists' understanding of cycling regulations and rules in Alabama. The survey results will help design the appropriate outreach programs to better educate both drivers and bicyclists.

https://uah.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_exhrpcJAXEaijWl



Sign up today to attend the [2018 SDITE Annual Meeting](#) to be held in Mobile from April 8 - 11, 2018. Since our section is hosting, we need to have great representation from all our section members. The Early Bird Registration rate of \$350 ends soon.

FHWA Publishes Guidance on TPM Travel Time Metric Data Reporting to HPMS

The third performance measure regulation in the National Performance Management Measures requires state DOTs to submit performance metric and related data to the Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS) by June 15, 2018 and annually thereafter. The national travel time-based performance measures include the: Interstate Travel Time Reliability Measure, Non-Interstate NHS Travel Time Reliability Measure, Freight Reliability Measure, and CMAQ Peak Hour Excessive Delay Measure. FHWA released a document with information and guidance on complying with these requirements

Interim Approval 21 – Rectangular Rapid-Flashing Beacons at Crosswalks

FHWA has published **Interim Approval 21 – Rectangular Rapid-Flashing Beacons at Crosswalks**. See https://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/resources/interim_approval/ia21/index.htm. This already has received notice on the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals listserv, so it is public information.

According to the Memo, any questions concerning this Interim Approval should be directed to Mr. Duane Thomas at duane.thomas@dot.gov.

Conditions of Interim Approval: The FHWA will grant Interim Approval for the optional use of the RRFB as a pedestrian-actuated conspicuity enhancement to supplement standard pedestrian crossing or school crossing signs at uncontrolled marked crosswalks to any jurisdiction that submits a written request to the Office of Transportation Operations. A State may request Interim Approval for all jurisdictions in that State. Jurisdictions using RRFBs under this Interim Approval must agree to the following:

- Comply with the Technical Conditions detailed in this memorandum;
- Maintain an inventory list of all locations at which the RRFB is installed; and
- Comply with all the conditions as listed in Paragraph 18 of Section 1A.10 of the MUTCD.

BTS Releases Pocket Guide to Transportation Mobile App

The Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) has released a new dynamic mobile app for the [Pocket Guide to Transportation 2018](#) – a quick reference guide to transportation statistics. This popular guide provides the latest transportation statistics at your fingertips in mobile app and printed formats. It covers data on major trends, moving people and goods, system use and performance, the economy, safety, infrastructure, and the environment. [Download](#) the app now to access all the features of the classic Pocket Guide plus enhanced navigation, sharable graphics to social media and email, and dynamic data updates to highlight the most recent up-to-date statistics. The app is available on the App Store and on Google Play (keyword: BTS Pocket Guide). To access the *Pocket Guide*, go to [BTS Pocket Guide to Transportation](#) or text USDOT BTSPG to 468311. This publication can also be obtained by [ordering online](#), by contacting BTS by phone at 202-366-DATA or by e-mail at answers@dot.gov.

For inquiries other than placing orders contact Dave Smallen: david.smallen@dot.gov or 202-366-5568.

Policy Change Announcement on Small and Custom Geography in CTPP

Following the release of the Census Transportation Planning Products (CTPP) 2012-2016 dataset in early 2019, the Oversight Board to the CTPP Program announces that it will no longer include Transportation Analysis Zone (TAZ) and Transportation Analysis District (TAD) geographies in future requests for special tabulations of the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) data. Future CTPP special tabulation requests will include the standard census block group geography instead. To best adapt to this change, the CTPP Board urges travel demand modelers, MPOs, state DOTs, and anyone who uses CTPP data by census TAZ and census TAD to participate in the 2020 Census Participant Statistical Areas Program (PSAP), and through it, adjust their census block group boundaries to better align with their model TAZ geographies. Click [HERE](#) for more information.

Making a Model a Good Predictive Tool

A basic part of travel demand model validation is running the model for a “base year” and comparing the outputs to observed data. In this [FHWA project](#), two model versions for each of two metropolitan areas were run twice each: 1) the more recent version for its base year and a backcast scenario (for the base year of the earlier model version), and 2) the earlier version for its base year and a forecast scenario (for the base year of the later model version). This research was intended to produce useful data on which model components are most stable over time and their sensitivities to the factors affecting travel demand that vary over time. The report includes lessons learned and recommendations for planning agencies.

New ADA Sidewalk and Curb Ramp Compliance App

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<http://www.vueworks.com/sidewalks-and-curb-ramps-application/>


- Simple to Use
- Download from Apple Store or Google Play
- Collect information at your pace
- Gathers ADA Compliance inventory and condition information
- Location is automatically collected in GIS

Transportation Dictionary

The USDOT released a searchable online dictionary that includes over 9,000 transportation terms and acronyms. The terms were collected from a variety of public and private transportation publications and databases. This dictionary presents over 9,000 terms and acronyms related to transportation. The terms and acronyms were obtained from various transportation publications and databases which exist within the federal government, private organizations, Canada and Mexico.

Search Tips

- Sources are listed in parenthesis after the definition.

- 
- None of the searches are case sensitive. Searching for PEDESTRIAN will produce the same results as searching for pedestrian.
 - The Dictionary searches for the word, phrase or acronym as it is entered and returns all records that match or contain that word, phrase or acronym. For example, searching for pedestrian will return records for pedestrian and pedestrian walkway.
- Click [HERE](#) for the search engine.