

Active Transportation Strategy: Preparing for the 112th Congress

This document summarizes Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's sense of the federal policy-making context facing active transportation proponents as the 112th Congress convenes in January 2011. We provide some initial thoughts on next steps and the role of state- and community-based partners to facilitate your own thinking and planning; we will make more specific suggestions going forward.

Notable changes in the 112th Congress for transportation issues include:

- Defeat of Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Oberstar, long-time champion for bicycling and master of transportation policy.
- Republicans assume majority status in the House.
 - Incoming majority leader Rep. Cantor (Va.) has taken aim at bicycle and pedestrian programs with his You Cut website. He is expected to bring such issues to House floor.
 - Rep. Mica (Fla.) named chair of Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. He has consistently supported trails in his district, but his committee staff person indicated interest in eliminating Transportation Enhancements.
- Democratic majority in Senate narrows, with moderate Republicans such as Sen. Voinovich (Ohio) departing, leaving the Environment and Public Works Committee even more polarized.
- The Administration is preparing to weigh in on reauthorization issues, but ultimate White House posture is not yet clear.

Themes that will shape the debate:

- Fiscal constraint: addressing the deficit and the size of government.
 - Go "back to basics" debate over the federal interest (i.e., argument that federal role is highways, especially interstates). Proponents of "basics" could seek to eliminate core programs such as Transportation Enhancements and Safe Routes to School, as well as newer multi-modal competitive opportunities such as TIGER.
 - Re-establish gas tax as strict user fee committed solely to automobiles (turning back the clock on 20 years of funding for active transportation and 40 years for transit).
- Economic recovery: Is infrastructure an effective source of job creation? Should stimulus funds be rescinded? Job creation may be key metric for transportation investment.

Reauthorization prospects:

- Current SAFTEA-LU extension expires December 31, 2010. Timing and scope scenarios for a transportation reauthorization bill include the following (or some combination thereof):
 1. The House's current continuing resolution (CR) contains a provision extending SAFTEA-LU until September 30, 2011. If this CR were to pass, work towards reauthorization by that date would begin in January. A bill in this timeframe might be similar in size to SAFTEA-LU.



2. Congress could pass a two-month extension and then put a bill into play before another extension becomes necessary. A bill in this timeframe might be smaller than SAFTEA-LU; in line with the actual projected assets of the Trust Fund.
3. A coalition of influential transportation organizations could pursue a two-year extension in hopes of reviving prospects for a large bill (perhaps double projected assets) by finding a way to sustain increased Highway Trust Fund revenue.

Next steps:

- Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) is staying the course in terms of seeking positive advancements in active transportation policy and funding along the lines of the ACT Act, but the next steps in our offense may be defensive moves. You Cut or appropriations challenges to core bicycling and walking programs must be turned back resoundingly. Doing so could inoculate these programs from challenges during reauthorization and set the stage for advancement.
- RTC will make an increased investment in cultivating Republican support. We have been seeking to re-establish the bipartisanship in Washington that we have long enjoyed at the community level where the value of trail and active transportation investments are undeniable, but this effort has taken on greater urgency.

RTC working together with state and local partners:

- RTC and national partners are identifying districts where outreach will be especially critical. Community partners and their local allies are the best messengers for this outreach. As our plan firms up, we will be in touch with many of you about scheduling meetings with your federal representatives and, where possible, showing them both accomplishments and future needs for active transportation infrastructure.
- RTC is working on messages and information that will best convey the case for investing in bicycling and walking in times of fiscal constraint. We'll make sure that those messages are heard on Capitol Hill, and state and local partners can use them back home.
- Rep. Mica is expected to hold a series of listening sessions around the country in preparation for reauthorization. RTC will monitor the process and strive to alert state and local partners regarding opportunities to provide input.
- RTC will look for opportunities to convene the most engaged state and local partners on a regional basis in 2011 to chart strategy and explore new ways to further the active transportation movement.

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