

Huge Shift in Transportation World: D.C. Now In Charge

It's been a long time since D.C. was the place to look for leadership on transportation policy, but, as with so much else, it's a whole new world for transportation policy, and Washington is where everything is happening. Perhaps the biggest change is the large new federal role (read funding) for high speed rail, with \$8 billion in the stimulus bill plus an additional \$1 billion in the federal budget. The Bay Area has a \$1.6 billion request for high speed rail stimulus funds, with a project list that includes construction at San Francisco's Transbay Terminal and San Jose's Diridon Station, rail electrification along the Peninsula corridor, grade separations, and a new train control system. The stimulus bill provides three years for the US Department of Transportation to select projects to fund, but the Obama administration has indicated that it plans to award some of the funds before the end of summer of this year. Meanwhile, Congress and the Administration are wrestling with how to write the transportation authorizing bill that will guide federal programs over the next seven years. The current authorization expires on September 30 of this year; without Congressional action, federal transportation programs (other than stimulus) would come to a halt. Congress is certain to not let that happen, but it is also very unlikely to finish writing the new law by then. Congress has its hands full with health care, climate change, and financial industry regulation, not to mention that writing the next federal transportation act includes the unpleasant chore of coming up with an additional \$200 billion to keep federal programs afloat. The Obama Administration and the Senate favor an 18 month interim bill that would largely continue federal transportation programs. The Council is looking for big improvements in the next transportation act—including expanded federal funding for goods movement, priority federal funding for major metropolitan areas suffering high congestion, and funding to restore and improve aging commuter rail systems—but most, it appears, will need to wait until 2011. We will start laying the groundwork for changes now.



Quote of the Week

“Next Wednesday we start a fiscal year with a massively unbalanced spending plan and a cash shortfall not seen since the Great Depression.” – [State Controller John Chiang](#) who also said that he will be forced to issue registered warrants – also known as IOUs – beginning July 2 if immediate budget and cash solutions are not quickly adopted by the Governor and Legislature.

Article of the Week

The Los Angeles Times has become a major news source and driver of the Constitutional Convention and reform in general. On Monday they published a piece by [our partner Steven Hill on delegate selection](#). On Thursday they ran a piece by California's newest and perhaps best bloggers [Jerry Roberts and Phil Trounstine on reform in California](#). Both pieces are well worth the read.