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## **Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization Federal Update December 16, 2014 - January 9, 2015**

Appropriations Update: On December 13, the Senate voted 56-40 in favor of a omnibus appropriations measure for fiscal year 2015. The \$1.092 trillion spending bill includes 11 out of the 12 annual appropriations bills, with the sole exception of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Senator Bill Nelson (D-Fla.) voted in favor of the measure, while Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) voted against.

DHS funding was excluded from the omnibus so that the new Republican controlled Congress can formulate a strong response to the president's executive order on illegal immigration. Funding for DHS will be extended at current levels through February 27.

Earlier in the week, on December 11, the House narrowly passed the bill by a vote of 219-206. In the House, 218 votes were required for passage. Republican leadership had to postpone the vote for several hours after dozens of members on both sides of the aisle voiced objections to the legislation. In the meantime, Congress was forced to adopt a two-day continuing resolution (CR) since the government had been operating under a CR that expired at midnight on December 11. As expected, President Obama later signed the bill into law on December 16.

Overall, the bill provides \$53.8 billion for transportation, housing, and urban development activities – \$2.9 billion or 6 percent more than FY 2014. When taking into consideration obligations from Highway Trust Fund monies, advance appropriations, and receipts and collections, the overall funding totals \$107.3 billion.

The legislation includes a net total of \$71.3 billion for the Department of Transportation, which includes \$17.8 billion in discretionary funding – or \$21 million more than FY 2014 – after \$382 million in rescissions and \$1 million in offsetting collections. Highlights of the transportation component include:

- \$500 million for Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Grants – \$100 million less than the FY 2014 enacted level, and does not provide funding for planning
- \$10.886 billion for the Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
  - \$8.595 billion for Transit Formula Grants
  - \$2.120 billion for Capital Investment grants (fixed guideway projects)
    - \$1.510 billion for existing Full Funding Grant Agreements (FFGAs)
    - \$120 million for Core Capacity projects
    - \$171.6 million for Small Starts

- \$325 million for new FFGAs, with priority for projects seeking less than 40 percent federal share
- \$41 billion for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
  - \$40.3 billion in obligations from the Highway Trust Fund
  - Requires FHWA to establish non-motorized safety performance measures for the Highway Safety Improvement Program, to be published by September 30, 2015
- \$830 million for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)
  - \$235 for highway safety programs
- \$1.39 billion for Amtrak
  - \$1.626 billion for the Federal Rail Administration (FRA)
  - Includes \$10 million for grants for grade crossing and track improvements on rail routes that transport energy products
  - Does not provide funding for high-speed rail

President Obama to Release FY 2016 Budget in February: According to the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB), President Obama will release his budget for fiscal year 2016 on February 2. The President is required by law to submit his budget to Congress on or before the first Monday in February, although he has failed to meet that deadline since 2010. Since sequestration is scheduled to be reinstated next fiscal year absent congressional action, the President is expected to reflect these cuts in his budget. This has the potential to impact funding at the local level for key transportation projects and programs. Although it remains to be seen how these programs will be impacted by sequestration, it is safe to expect that the Republican-controlled Congress will largely ignore the President's FY 2016 budget and set new priorities through that process.

Representative John Boehner Re-Elected as House Speaker: On January 6, the House voted for the third time to reelect Congressman John Boehner (R-Ohio) as Speaker of the House. 25 Republicans voted against Speaker Boehner, including Representatives Ted Yoho (R-Fla.), Bill Posey (R-Fla.), Daniel Webster (R-Fla.), Rich Nugent (R-Fla.), and Curt Clawson (R-Fla.). House Representative Pete Sessions (R-Texas), who voted for Speaker Boehner, said of the dissenting votes and Republican party in general: "We need to be aware that we got to do a better job to effectively communicate what we stand for and why we're here." Overall, Speaker Boehner managed to garner 216 Republican votes.

Gas Tax Increase: Over the past few weeks, a number of Republican members have spoken publicly in support of increasing the gas tax. Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee Chairman John Thune (R-S.D.), was recently quoted as saying "we have to look at all the options. I don't think we take anything off the table at this point." Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chairman Jim Inhofe had similar comments: "The other day on a Sunday show, John Thune said nothing is off the table and I agree with him."

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) largely agreed with Senators Inhofe and Thune saying that while he opposes increasing the gas tax, "I would prefer not to increase taxes, but to me that's a user fee," he said. "People who use the highways ought to pay for them."

However, House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Chairman Bill Shuster (R-Pa.) discounted the viability of a gas tax increase as a means of shoring up spending for critical transportation infrastructure projects across the country: “The president has ruled out a gas tax, I don't think there's a will in Congress, and the American people don't want it.” Chairman Shuster prefers for a “vehicle-miles-traveled” tax should be considered instead.

Transportation Outlook for 2015: Now that the 114th Congress has convened, a number of key transportation issues are expected to be considered by both Congress and the various federal agencies. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Bill Shuster (R-Pa.) stated recently that “every one of the subcommittees has the potential to do a pretty significant piece of legislation.” Some of the key transportation issues that Congress and the federal agencies may consider include: passenger rail reauthorization, surface transportation reauthorization, and FAA reauthorization.

Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chairman Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.) met with the committee’s Republican members on January 7 to discuss potential priorities for the new Congress. Senator Inhofe indicated that transportation reauthorization legislation will be first on the agenda for the committee: “We want a long-term transportation bill. A sizable and a robust one.”

Transportation Committees Announcements: This week, a few congressional committees that oversee transportation funding and policy announced chairmen and ranking members for their subcommittees. Committees should finalize leadership positions and member rooster by February.

On the Senate Commerce Committee, which oversees passenger rail and goods movement, Senator Deb Fischer (R-Neb.) will chair the Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety, and Security Subcommittee. Senator Marco Rubio will be chairman of the Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard Subcommittee. He served as ranking member during the last Congress.

On January 9, Senate Appropriations Committee Ranking Member Barbara Mikulski (D- Md.) announced the ranking member selections for the Senate Appropriations subcommittees.

<b><u>Senate Appropriations Subcommittee</u></b>	<b><u>Democratic Senator</u></b>
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies	Jeff Merkley (Oregon)
Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies	Barbara Mikulski (Maryland)
Department of Defense	Dick Durbin (Illinois)
Energy and Water Development	Dianne Feinstein (California)
Financial Services and General Government	Chris Coons (Delaware)
Department of Homeland Security	Jeanne Shaheen (New Hampshire)
Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies	Tom Udall (New Mexico)
Departments of Labor, Health and Human	Patty Murray (Washington)

Services, and Education, and Related Agencies	
Legislative Branch	Brian Schatz (Hawaii)
Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies	Jon Tester (Montana)
State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs	Patrick Leahy (Vermont)
Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies	Jack Reed (Rhode Island)

President Re-nominates Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Administrator: President Barack Obama has re-nominated Therese McMillan to lead the FTA. McMillan, currently the agency's acting administrator, was nominated for the permanent job last Congress, and the Senate Banking Committee approved but was never confirmed by the Senate. McMillan has been deputy administrator since 2009 and previously worked as a local transportation official in the San Francisco area.