

RAILCET INTELLIGENCE REPORT

To: RAILCET
From: Ray Chambers
Date: January 10, 2025

Subject: APTA MONTHLY INTERCITY AND HIGH-SPEED RAIL JANUARY STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING.

Chairman Chad Edison opened the meeting. He was in a moving train. He is focused on the rail Emergency Response to the California fires. APTA VP Art Guzzetti chaired the remainder of the session.

Funding Update - The Biden FRA is announcing as many capital rail grants as possible prior to January 20. Kemmu Zeng (FRA) informed the group that today FRA is releasing \$1.1 billion rail crossing elimination grants that will be distributed to forty-one states.

Incoming DOT Secretary Duffy and FRA Administrator David Fink, Jr. Sean Duffy's confirmation hearing is scheduled before the Commerce Committee on January 15. No opposition emerged. David Fink, Jr. is not well known in the rail policy community. I provided some background on the Tim Mellon acquisition of the Guildford Network centered on Boston and Maine and creation of PanAm railways which was sold to CSX. Since the Mellon acquisition, this network was managed by David Fink, Sr. and son David Fink, Jr. While Fink, Sr. was a controversial figure, Fink Jr. is not. There was some relief that he has a background in regional rail management.

Reauthorization of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) –This was the major point of discussion.

- APTA Plan– Guzzetti said we need to begin now to build support for reauthorization. He feels we should support extension of the basic law, but at the same time prepare amendments.
- RC Comments. I noted events could move more quickly as Trump is calling for a Single Bill that would encompass all major Trump priorities This BIL rail authorization could be pulled into the Single Bill which could move this year. Chris Brady disagreed arguing there are too many other critical issues and it is not likely policy makers will get around to passenger rail any time soon. I suggested we should early on develop a theme that could be attractive to the Trump team— such as presenting the reauthorization as an opportunity for “a golden age of passenger railroading—Again!” There was general agreement that a theme should be identified.
- Clawback of currently appropriated funds. There is immediate concern that the billions in currently appropriated BIL funds for Amtrak and State intercity passenger rail capital grants could be clawed back to offset other Trump priorities. Brady understands the Parliamentarian of the House has made some kind of ruling that the BIL funds cannot be used for offsets. Amtrak is not sure about that and expressed doubt over the supposed Parliamentary ruling. Guzzetti said APTA would track it down.
- House T&I Committee begins hearings on BIL Reauthorization. On January 15, the full T&I Committee will hold its first hearing on the BIL reauthorization. This will be followed by a series of subcommittee hearings.

- TRB Cataloging BIL accomplishments. – The Transportation Research Board (TRB) has just completed their winter meetings. Much of the program was directed at cataloging BIL accomplishments. According to Guzzetti this will be a part of the overall effort to build a basis of support for continuation of the rail programs.
- BIL Reauthorization Core Strategy Group. Edison announced he will create a Steering Committee Core Strategy Group on the Reauthorization. I asked to be included.

Webinar Series -Karen Philbrick, Executive Director of the Mineta Institute, reported on APTA sponsored webinars on foreign experience on high performance rail. The first one took place on Wednesday, December 11, on “The French Case: Stations as City Boosters” The second will be January 15 – “Spain Case Study.” The third will be February 12 – “German Case Study.” On February 26 – Wrap-up Presentation that Synthesizes Best Practices.

Speedlines Magazine – Ken Sislak has compiled articles for the February Magazine. The key article will track the status of all sixty-nine new intercity rail projects under the Corridor Identification and Development (CID) program that received FRA scoping grants.

Steering Committee for 2025 – The year’s Steering Committee meetings are scheduled for Friday January 10; * Friday, February 21; Friday, March 21; Friday, April 18; Friday, June 2; Friday, July 18; Friday, August 15; Friday, October 17; Friday, November 21; Friday, December 19.