

RAILCET INTELLIGENCE REPORT #26-18

Senate Moves Transport Bill With Rail Title

Not Good for Intercity Passenger Rail

To: Team RAILCET
From: Ray Chambers
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Team RAILCET:

As reported last week Senate Majority Leader Thune is moving a brief extension of the lapsing surface transportation law which includes the Rail Title. The current IIJA expires September 30. This extension will provide a new authorization to run from September 30 to December 11. A Senate vote is expected today at 5:30 pm Eastern.

This is not a good bill for the advocates of intercity passenger rail. While this “clean” extension reauthorizes rail funding for a brief period, it terminates rail “advance appropriations” that are now the backbone of rail grant funding. As stated in my last report, the IIJA advance appropriations represent better than 80% of the funding now available for rail projects in the near term. APTA launched a forceful lobby effort in the Senate, which I supported in an APTA Intercity Passenger Committee call last week. It appears this morning that these efforts have failed in the Senate.

The Senate bill essentially kicks the IIJA/RailTitle reauthorization decision down the road to mid-December. If passed, the measure will give lawmakers time to try to move full multi-year authorization through Congress during the lame duck. However, it must first be accepted by the House without change and signed by the President. It seems to reflect Administration priorities so it will probably move.

In my view long-term intercity passenger rail funding will be a priority RAILCET issue in the coming months. Without long term funds, passenger providers are reduced to tin cup begging before the Appropriations Committees every year. That never works well and is perhaps the primary reason American intercity passenger railroading is a failure in comparison to the systems in Europe and Japan.

In my view our Priority Objective in the coming reauthorization battle will be the continuation of advanced appropriations or some other long-term funding such as is enjoyed by highway and aviation.

I would like to get a formal RAILCET position on this with backing of our international union leadership. We should discuss.

Ray Chambers