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Subject: AASHTO Legislative Alert: Senate Passes \$2T COVID-19 Emergency Legislation

AASHTO Board of Directors:

Last night, the Senate Republicans and Democrats reached a major deal in conjunction with the White House on a massive \$2 trillion federal aid package to provide emergency assistance and health care response for individuals, families, and businesses affected by the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. After the Senate's 96-0 vote before adjourning until April 20, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (HR 748) now goes to the House where passage on a voice vote is scheduled for Friday. The [legislative text can be found here](#).

As an emergency relief measure, the CARES Act focused on the most immediate needs faced by our country from the COVID-19 pandemic. For state DOTs, there is operational funding support for aviation, public transportation, and passenger rail. AASHTO had also urged [Wednesday](#) last week to Congress and [yesterday](#) to FHWA for more flexibility on truck weight limits by delegating the authority fully to states. While this request was not included, the package nevertheless includes language that clarifies that states are provided the authority to issue special permits to overweight vehicles and loads to allow for the free flow of critical relief supplies and other related goods when responding to the recovery efforts of both emergencies and major disasters, including COVID-19 and any future pandemic events.

Here is the summary of transportation infrastructure provisions.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION – \$31.1 billion

- Federal Transit Administration, Transit Infrastructure Grants – \$25 billion for transit providers, including states and local governments across the country, for operating and capital expenses. Funding will be distributed using existing FTA formulas, with an estimated \$1.8 billion for rural systems funded under Section 5311.
- Amtrak – \$1.018 billion for Amtrak operating assistance to cover revenue losses related to coronavirus. No less than \$239 million is provided for state supported services and states are not required to pay more than 80 percent of FY 2019 costs.
- Federal Aviation Administration, Airport Improvement Program (AIP) – \$10 billion to maintain operations at our nation's airports that are facing a record drop in passengers. AIP funds will be distributed by formula.
- Federal Highway Administration – Language to clarify that states can issue special permits for overweight vehicles and loads to allow for the free flow of critical relief supplies during the current coronavirus epidemic for the duration of the fiscal year.
- Essential Air Service (EAS) – \$56 million provided to maintain existing air service to rural communities. This funding is necessary to offset the reduction in overflight fees that help pay for the EAS program.

In addition to these USDOT provisions, \$32 billion in grants are provided for aviation sector businesses outside the appropriations process, and up to \$46 billion in loans and loan guarantees are provided for aviation sector businesses.

AASHTO staff maintained constant communication with Capitol Hill on this “Phase 3” bill requesting truck weight flexibility, backstopping state revenue declines expected, and operating support for passenger rail, rural transit, and general aviation. We will now ramp up our focus on the next COVID-19 legislation (Phase 4) to make the case for robust transportation investment in this next package which will serve as the foundation of our national economic recovery for months and years to come.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

Jim

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