Congressional Outlook

Week of May 19th

This week should see an end to the long process of reauthorizing the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 (WRDA). While WRDA bills are typically passed by Congress on a two-year cycle, this reauthorization has been nearly seven years in the making. But after a six-month negotiation period, the House-Senate Conference Committee overseeing the finalization of the bill released the final conference report last week. The bill, named the Water Resources Reform and Development Act, will be fast tracked through the House and Senate this week with the goal of getting it to the President for signature by the end of the week. Votes are expected in the House as early as Tuesday, May 20 with a Senate vote immediately following.

The House Appropriations Committee will mark-up the FY 2015 Transportation-HUD and Agriculture and Rural Development spending bills this week in their respective subcommittees. While the Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development will hold a hearing on ways to bring our transit infrastructure to a state of good repair.

Week in Review

FCC Proposes Rule on Net Neutrality

On Thursday, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted to propose a rule that could reinstate net neutrality practices that allow internet service providers to manage their networks in "commercially reasonable" fashions including charging companies for faster and more reliable delivery of their traffic to users. The Commission's 3-2 vote was largely partisan in nature and triggers a 120-day public comment period on the proposed rule making. The move by the FCC has certainly spurred much debate within the technology industry and on Capitol Hill, including protests at the FCC during last week's vote. For more information on the proposed
rulemaking, including how to submit comments, visit the FCC’s website.

**Filibuster in the Senate on Tax Extender Legislation**

Senate Republicans filibustered the tax extenders bill last week, although party leaders contend that they will continue to work toward agreement on which amendments would be allowed to the bill. Sen. Jack Reed wants to add a one-year unemployment extension to the Senate's $85 billion tax cut bill. Reed is also urging the House to take up the Senate-passed, Reed-Heller bill, which provides for a retroactive extension ending in June. That five-month extension was negotiated over months after Republicans filibustered an earlier proposal, which failed to advance by a single vote in February. House Speaker John Boehner, maintains that he will not move any unemployment extension until the White House makes him a new offer on jobs. Labor Secretary Thomas E. Perez has offered to negotiate with Boehner but no negotiations have commenced. President Obama has not threatened to veto a tax cut extension bill that does not include an unemployment extension. The $85 billion Senate bill includes more than 50 tax breaks that expired at the end of last year. It would add to the deficit because it is not offset with spending cuts or tax hikes.

**Water Resources Conference Report Released**

After six months of negotiations, the House-Senate Conference Committee responsible for negotiating differences between the Senate and House versions of the Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRRDA) bills announced a deal on the final bill last Thursday. The release of the final conference agreement includes the legislative text, a section-by-section summary, and a short summary by senior Senate conferees. The full House and Senate are expected to vote on final approval of the bill early this week before sending it to the President for signature.

The WRRDA bill authorizes new projects for the Army Corps of Engineers to study and construct only if a "Chief's Report," or feasibility study, has been filed with Congress. This process allows new projects to be authorized without breaking the earmark ban Congress set for itself several years ago, by recognizing a Chief's Report as a request from the Administration, and, therefore, exempting the project from being classified as a congressional earmark. The bill also includes a provision known as the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) pilot program. Having a WIFIA pilot in the final bill attests to the interest in Congress to create additional financing mechanisms to fund water infrastructure projects that are innovative and result in minimal cost to the Treasury.

**Senate Acts on Highway Reauthorization Bill**

Last week, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee - which has jurisdiction over highways in the Senate - approved a bill to reauthorize surface transportation programs that provides $265 billion in funding over six years and continues the core program structure put in place in the MAP-21 bill. Funding is continued at current levels, adjusted for inflation, through fiscal year 2020. For bill highlights, and more on where NATaT funding priorities stand in the bill, click here.
Tuesday, May 20

- House Natural Resources Committee Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources oversight hearing on "American Energy Jobs: Opportunities for American Manufacturing."
- House Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Subcommittee markup of FY 2015 Agriculture Appropriations Bill.
- House Veterans’ Affairs Full Committee hearing on "Evaluating Federal and Community Efforts to Eliminate Veteran Homelessness."
- House Natural Resources Committee Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans, and Insular Affairs oversight hearing on "Oil and Gas Activities within Our Nation's Wildlife Refuge System."
- Senate Health Education Labor and Pensions Full Committee hearing to examine economic security for working women.

Wednesday, May 21

- House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation hearing on "Using New Ocean Technologies: Promoting Efficient Maritime Transportation and Improving Maritime Domain Awareness and Response Capability.
- House Energy and Commerce Committee Subcommittee on Energy and Power hearing on the "Promoting New Manufacturing Act."
- House Energy and Commerce Committee Subcommittee on Health hearing on "Keeping the Promise: Site of Service Medicare Payment Reforms."
- House Small Business Full Committee hearing on "Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer Programs."
- Senate Finance Committee Subcommittee on Social Security Pensions, and Family Policy hearing to examine strengthening Social Security to meet the needs of tomorrow's retirees.

Thursday, May 22

- Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development hearing to examine bringing our transit infrastructure to a state of good repair.