

FAST FACTS: WHAT THE NEW SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BILL MEANS FOR TRANSIT

On December 4, 2015, President Obama signed the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act – which is the first five-year surface transportation legislation passed by Congress since SAFETEA-LU in 2005. MAP-21, the 2012 law governing surface transportation, only provided two years of funding certainty, and transportation officials have been relying on dozens of temporary extensions and stopgap funding measures to keep services and projects moving forward since the original legislation expired in September of 2014. The FAST Act guarantees federal funding through September 30, 2020, giving transportation providers a reprieve from the anxious funding battles that have marked federal transportation policy over the past few years.

Beyond the pivot back to long-term funding provisions, the FAST Act makes few changes to the policies and programs introduced in MAP-21. The largest programmatic changes made by the act include the introduction of a National Freight Program, conversion of Surface Transportation Program (STP) formula funds into block grants, and the expansion of eligibility for low-cost federal loans through existing programs. The FAST Act maintains the USDOT's commitment to national performance goals, and leaves requirements for performance-based transportation planning at the metropolitan and state levels largely untouched.

Finally, the act provides a modest increase in funding levels for both FHWA and FTA, but mostly maintains the funding proportions dedicated to each agency's existing programs. FTA receives its largest funding increases for two programs: 15% per year more for the State of Good Repair Program



(Section 5337), and 60% per year more for the Bus and Bus Facilities Program (Section 5339). Overall, FAST dedicates approximately \$1 billion more each year to transit than MAP-21 allocated.

While the FAST Act refrains from dramatically altering any major public transportation policies or provisions, it contains a plethora of minor modifications to existing FTA programs, which are summarized in the following sections.

Metropolitan and Statewide Planning Program (5303/5304)

FAST makes minor changes to FTA's planning programs. The act clarifies the selection and role of transit agency representatives on MPO boards, increases the emphasis on intercity transportation planning – specifically adding intercity bus as a planning consideration – and expands the scope of the planning process to include resiliency and reliability of the transportation system.

Urbanized Area Formula Grants (5307)

The largest program under FTA receives several minor adjustments under the FAST Act. Notably, the old "100-bus rule" for operating cost recoupment

has been expanded to include non-ADA general population demand response transit service. 5307 recipients will now be able to use up to 20% of their funding allocation for paratransit service if certain conditions are met; previously, they were limited to 10%. The act eliminates the 1% spending requirement for Associated Transit Improvements, allows grantees to use up to 0.5% of their allocation on Workforce Development activities, and increases the set-aside for Small Transit Intensive Cities (STIC) from 1.5% to 2%.

Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities (5310)

The FAST Act expands the eligibility of providers to become designated recipients of 5310 funding if they are eligible to receive direct funding under either 5307 or 5311. The act directs FTA to develop a "best practices" guidebook for 5310 service providers, which will include information on service delivery options, performance measures, innovation, and other research. The act also charges the national, interagency Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) to create an updated strategic plan to address coordination within the federal government.

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NOTES FROM THE TOP



BY DONNA LAVIGNE

are appreciative of the work that the Metropolitan Planning Organizations are doing to support the FTA's coordination requirements. Please make every effort to attend the quarterly coordination meetings in your region. Your input is valuable to the success of human services coordination. Also, we hosted our first of two coordination workshops in Baton Rouge on March 15, 2016. Thanks to all that made this workshop a success. The second coordination workshop is scheduled for April 4, 2016 in Shreveport. We look forward to seeing you guys and welcome your participation.

In next few months, we will be scheduling several cost allocation workshops and Passenger Assistance Safety (PASS) Trainings. Please look for more information on dates and locations in your email and on our website.

Just a gentle reminder for all of our providers, the end of the fiscal year is approaching, June 30. To ensure payment for FY 2015-2016 invoices, please send final invoice to our office no later than July 10. We will be sending out notices as we get closer to that date.

Finally, we would like to encourage you to send topics or articles for future newsletter editions. If you would like to highlight your transit system or recognize one of your staff members, we will provide a forum to do so. We encourage you to share innovative ideas, techniques and uplifting stories about your transit system and/or a special client. We want the transit newsletter to be an informative publication that addresses issues of interest to you and others.

That's it for this time....and thanks for all that you do in providing safe and reliable transportation services for the citizens of Louisiana!

Have a safe and happy Easter holiday!



Greetings to all! I'm back! Thanks to everyone for your thoughts and prayers! The recent storms and flooding have reminded us of the value of public transportation resources during emergencies. Many of our providers assisted in evacuations to and from shelters, for which there are many grateful Louisiana citizens. The situation also highlighted the need to get in touch with local governments, Emergency Operations Centers, and shelters to plan in advance of hour our resources are best utilized. Please help in our education efforts and let everyone know about the DOTD Resource Guide and how to access it for vital contact information.

As always, the Public Transportation Section has a multitude of things going on. Currently, we are finalizing the reviews of the Elderly and Disabled, Rural, JARC, and New Freedom applications. We should be submitting them to FTA for review by the end of March. We are continuing to conduct annual compliance reviews, workshops, and trainings; preparing the new fiscal year contracts; and conducting outreach to parishes without public transportation services.

We continue to move forward with our statewide coordination efforts, and



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ANNOUNCEMENTS & EVENTS

DOTD will be hosting a second Coordination Workshop on **April 4th** at the Eldorado in Shreveport. Stay tuned for details!



NTI COURSES

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT: www.ntionline.com

APR 5 - 6	Introduction to Transit Asset Management Charlotte, NC
APR 6 - 7	FTA Real Estate Requirements Philadelphia, PA
JUN 6 - 10	Transit Academy 2016 Philadelphia, PA

TRB EVENTS

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT: www.trb.org

APR 13-16	2016 Joint Rail Conference Orlando, FL
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APTA EVENTS

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT: www.apta.com

APR 11-13	Fare Collection and Revenue Management Summit & TransiTech Conference San Diego, CA
APR 30 - MAY 3	Transit Board Members & Board Support Seminar San Antonio, TX
MAY 15 -18	2016 Bus & Paratransit Conference Charlotte, NC
JUN 12 -15	Risk Management Seminar Albany, NY
JUN 19 - 22	2016 Rail Conference..... Phoenix, AZ

SWTA EVENTS

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT: www.swta.org

JUN 27 - JUL 1	Transit Law Seminar & NTI Transit Service Planning Course..... San Antonio, TX
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SPOTLIGHT ON...

THE TANGIPAHOA VOLUNTARY COUNCIL ON AGING & DEBI FLEMING

The Tangipahoa Voluntary Council on Aging (COA) began providing transportation services in 1983, when DOTD asked the COA to apply for what was then called Section 18 funding to reimburse drivers using their own personal vehicles to transport citizens of Tangipahoa Parish. Almost 10 years later, Ms. Debi Fleming – a resident of Hammond since 1968 – joined the COA and is today its executive director.

Since the COA started providing transportation services, Section 18 has become Section 5311 and the amount and variety of transportation services the agency offers to the citizens of the parish has expanded considerably. Today, Ms. Fleming oversees a staff of 38, and the agency provides over 2,000 trips each month to both elderly citizens as well as the general public. The agency has also expanded beyond the typical demand-responsive services of Section 5311 providers to offer “deviated fixed-route” service in Hammond and – most recently – Ponchatoula, which is an accomplishment that Ms. Fleming is particularly proud of.

The Section 5307-funded deviated fixed route service in the two cities functions similarly to a standard fixed-route service. The cities agree to pay the matching operating costs to support a loop route that runs once an hour from 8AM to 4PM, Monday through Friday, stopping at designated bus stops within the city limits. However, the route can deviate up to ¼ mile from its typical route to serve passengers requiring ADA-compliant paratransit. In practice, Ms. Fleming has found that most individuals who would require the route deviation would take a demand-response vehicle for the same fare, so the bus tends to keep to its fixed route. The service has added approximately \$300-\$600 every month in fare revenue that the agency is able to reinvest in improving all of its services.

Ms. Fleming is relieved that there have been few major obstacles to implementing Section 5307 service



in the parish. The most challenging aspect of Section 5307 has been the increase in the amount of federal regulations and guidelines that must now be adhered to by the parish government. While she is grateful for the support of DOTD, the COA and parish governments have had a steep learning curve for the new programs. She has also faced pushback from some individuals who want the agency to be “everything for everyone” – particularly those who don’t qualify for the demand responsive services but who still want the benefit of on-demand transit. Ultimately, Ms. Fleming sees the fixed route services freeing up vehicles so the COA can serve even more people by giving individuals under 60 who are able to get to a designated bus stop more options.

While others may be content to call it a day with those kinds of successes, Ms. Fleming says the agency is not done growing. There is another deviated fixed route planned for US Hwy 51 from Kentwood to the “hub” at Northoaks Medical Center where the Hammond and Ponchatoula routes currently meet. The parish government has committed

to forming a committee to enlist smaller towns and businesses located on US Hwy 51 to provide the matching funds. Ms. Fleming would also like to expand the ability of customers to get real-time information on the fixed-route busses in case of weather or maintenance related delays. She enjoys being able to think of new ideas and have her talented, caring, and compassionate staff – Mary Dowling, Vanessa Foster, Sheila Genusa-Stegall, Joan Jones, and their eleven dedicated drivers – carry out the details.

Regardless of what the future has in store for the COA, the agency is in good hands with Debi Fleming. Her volunteer work and board memberships all revolve around the COA – she truly puts everything she has into making the agency the best it can be. Why? “I just love, love, love my job!” she says. And while she’s enjoyed great success at making sure everyone in Tangipahoa Parish can get around, she prefers to spend her free time at home woodworking, sewing, and making stained glass. Finally, she is thankful for the support of her husband of 38 years, Frank, and their son Dustin.

DOTD ON THE GO...



One of the DOTD PT Section's mandates is to provide information and technical assistance to transit providers in Louisiana in order to assist them in meeting their requirements for FTA funding. These activities come in many different formats and venues. DOTD PT provides numerous training courses, workshops, and training materials, as well as a website and an annual conference. To keep all of our constituents up to date on DOTD PT's activities, DOTD On The Go features just a few selected items each quarter.

SITE VISITS

Part of the outreach and assistance that LaDOTD provides to the Rural Public Transportation (Section 5311) and Elderly and Disabled (Section 5310) providers are site visits from the program managers. LaDOTD conducted five site visits for Section 5311 during this quarter in Terrebonne, St. Martin, Bienville, and Lincoln parishes. Additionally LaDOTD performed eleven Section 5310 site visits.

OUTREACH

To further the goal of providing some form of public transportation in all 64 parishes, as listed in the Louisiana Vision 2020 Plan, LaDOTD has been conducting educational visits to all the parishes in Louisiana that do not currently have some form of public transit service. LaDOTD conducted coordination meetings with the Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments and Ouachita Council of Governments in February.

TRAINING

DOTD staff provided STTARS training and training for Section 5310 grant applicants in mid-January, and conducted trainings for New Freedom providers in Calcasieu and St. Mary parishes at the end of January.

If your agency or someone within your agency deserves recognition for a job well done, or has already received recognition or an award, please let us know. Email or send a brief description, photos, and contact information to Donna.Lavigne@la.gov or to Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development/Public Transit Section, attn: Donna Lavigne, P.O. Box 94245, Baton Rouge, LA 70804.

One of the biggest changes for FTA under the FAST Act comes in the form of a new pilot program under Section 5310. Section 3006(b) of the act creates a discretionary pilot program for innovative coordinated access and mobility open to any 5310 recipients or sub-recipients to fund projects that improve coordination of transportation services and non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) services.

Formula Grants for Rural Areas (5311)

The 5311 program remains largely unchanged under the FAST Act. The act clarifies which costs are to be counted towards the local match for intercity bus feeder service, and now allows advertisement & concessions revenue to be used as a local match.

Public Transportation Safety and Oversight (5329)

The FAST Act expands MAP-21's focus on public transportation safety. It allows for FTA to temporarily assume control of State Safety Oversight (SSO) agencies that are deficient in their duties, grants

FTA permission to issue national transit safety directives, and requires the agency to conduct a review of public transportation safety standards and protocols. FTA will also be required to release a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) on transit driver safety & risk of assault.

Bus and Bus Facilities (5339)

Perhaps the biggest change in the FAST Act comes with the reinstatement of the Bus Discretionary Program (Section 5339(b)), which represents the bulk of the increase in funding level for the 5339 program overall. The additional \$268M in funding for 5339(b) includes a \$55M set-aside for a Low- or No-Emission Bus Deployment competition, while the remaining amount will be distributed competitively based on age and condition of assets. Additionally, the FAST Act now allows states to submit statewide applications for bus needs, and allows any state or local government agency eligible to receive funds directly under 5307 or 5311 to be a direct recipient of 5339 funds.

Other Changes

The FAST Act makes a few other mentionable changes beyond the major FTA funding programs. The Act consolidates the Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) and other research programs into a new Section 5312 called "Public Transportation Innovation," and expands funding for research to include both trust fund and general fund sources. The act also consolidates Technical Assistance and Workforce Development into Section 5314, gradually phases-in an increase to the Buy America provision to 70% by FY 2020, and makes some changes to federal procurement rules intended to increase the opportunities for grantees to aggregate planned rolling stock purchases.

For more information on public transportation provisions of the FAST Act, see FTA's FAST Act website:

<https://www.fta.dot.gov/funding/grants/fast-act>

FROM CAPITOL HILL...

On March 16, FTA published a final rule strengthening the **State Safety Oversight (SSO)** program for rail transit systems. The rule takes effect 30 days after publication and applies to the 30 states where a rail transit system operates (including Louisiana). The SSO final rule is part of a larger initiative to strengthen safety in public transportation that began taking effect in 2015.

Beyond the SSO rule, FTA is proceeding with three other major components of the regulatory framework needed to implement and strengthen its safety oversight and enforcement authority. The **Public Transportation Safety Certification Training Program** has been at least partially in effect since May 2015, and FTA is reviewing comments received on the proposed rule to make those provisions permanent. The agency recently released Notices of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRMs) for both the [National Public Transportation Safety Plan](#) and the [Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan](#). **Comments on both NPRMs are being accepted until April 5th.**

These actions and other related rules reinforce FTA's commitment to the principles of **Safety Management Systems (SMS)**. According to FTA, the SMS is a "formal, top-down, organization-wide approach to managing safety risk." An SMS provides a proactive system for transit operators to identify hazards and consequences, assesses safety risks associated with those consequences, and implements risk mitigation as a result. It is driven by goals, objectives, and collection of data specifically targeted towards safety, rather than business goals or services.

The final rule on SSO can be accessed here: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-03-16/pdf/2016-05489.pdf>.

