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## **Federal Transportation Bill a Disappointment for New Jersey**

### *Bill maintains funding and avoids transit cuts, but rolls back safety and environmental protections*

*In response to the announcement of a conference committee deal to authorize the federal transportation program through September 2014, transportation advocates expressed disappointment at the bill's lack of reforms and at provisions that would make it harder for communities in New Jersey to provide input on major projects and improve street safety:*

“While the bill allows the country to avoid a shutdown of transportation funding, it shuts down progress in many areas,” said Veronica Vanterpool, Tri-State Transportation Campaign executive director. “It reduces funding for bike and pedestrian projects, rolls back environmental protections, and incentivizes new road building and driving. It’s now up to local and state leaders to fight for a more accountable, environmentally sustainable transportation system.”

The Senate had crafted a forward-looking, bipartisan bill, MAP-21. Unfortunately, many positive reforms that had been included in MAP-21 were dropped from the final deal, including provisions to restore the transit commuter benefit to \$240/month (it fell to \$125/month at the beginning of the year), give transit agencies flexibility over how they spend their federal funds, and focus road and bridge funding on repair and maintenance.

The legislation avoids cuts to public transportation. It would provide new sources of funding for repair of transit systems, and help municipalities build around their rail and bus stations.

However, the bill would make large portions of dedicated pedestrian and bicycle funding optional for states. Currently, less than 3% of federal transportation funding is dedicated for pedestrian and bicycle projects, and local communities rely on these small programs to improve safety and promote economic development.

“For municipalities, this legislation is a mixed bag. It cuts funding programs for Main Street improvements and pedestrian safety that are very popular and badly needed,” said NJ Future Executive Director Pete Kasabach. “However, it does offer new funds for transit-oriented development, and New Jersey thankfully avoids a cut to transit.”

“Despite a dramatic increase in bicycle and pedestrian commuters in Trenton and other New Jersey communities, the federal transportation bill heads in the wrong direction on bicycle and pedestrian funding,” said Trenton Cycling Revolution Chairperson Dan Fatton. “We should be replicating Safe Routes to School programs at almost every school in

the country, and increasing the amount of money dedicated to bicycle and pedestrian projects. Unfortunately, despite widespread grassroots support for such policies, Congress has offered a bad bill that takes us in the opposite direction.”

The bill also appears to roll back environmental protections, making it harder for local communities to provide input on major projects that impact their air, water, health, property, and quality of life. It changes the federal TIFIA loan program by removing criteria that considered environmental sustainability, project significance, and other factors. As a result, the program could send more money to states that are building many new roads (like North Carolina and Indiana) and less to states in our region.

“Though the bill lacks significant reforms, it does avoid the most extreme cuts supported by some in the House,” Tri-State Transportation Campaign Federal Advocate Steven Higashide said. “Thanks in large part to members of New Jersey’s delegation, Congress successfully defeated proposals to cut all dedicated funding for public transportation, walking, and cycling projects. We thank them for their hard work.”

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