

TRANSPORTATION WEEKLY

UPDATE – SENATE TO RESUME STIMULUS BILL TOMORROW

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2009 – 9:40 P.M.

After threatening to keep the Senate in session all night to work on the stimulus bill, Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) relented and allowed the Senate to adjourn for the evening.

The Senate will reconvene tomorrow morning at 10 a.m. and immediately resume consideration of H.R. 1, the stimulus bill. There is no agreement in place to structure legislative business once the Senate comes back in the morning, but Reid said he hoped that the Senate could hold early roll call votes on several pending amendments, including two by Sen. Tom Coburn (R-OK) – one (#176) which would require all contracts and grants funded by the bill to be awarded competitively, and one (#309) which would prohibit any funds provided by the bill from being used for a variety of purposes, including highway beautification projects.

Several votes on amendments were held on Thursday, a few of which were in some way related to transportation and public works. They included:

***The Senate defeated an amendment by Sens. Russ Feingold (D-WI) and John McCain (R-AZ) that would have required 60 votes in the Senate for any unauthorized appropriation, by vote of 32 yeas, 65 nays.

***The Senate agreed by voice vote to an amendment by Environment and Public Works chairman Barbara Boxer (D-CA) that requires funds provided by the bill to be available

for expedited processing of environmental impact statements under the NEPA law and requires regular reports to Congress on the status of ongoing NEPA clearances.

***The Senate defeated (also by voice vote) a competing amendment by Sen. John Barrasso (R-WY) that would have required all NEPA reviews to be completed within 270 days or else the review would be deemed to be approved.

The Senate spent much of the day waiting for the unveiling of a bipartisan package of spending cuts to be proposed by Sens. Susan Collins (R-ME) and Ben Nelson (D-NE) that will remove at least \$75 billion from the bill. An early draft of that proposal would eliminate the \$5.5 billion in discretionary surface transportation grants from the bill, however, none of the details are official, as the amendment is still not finalized.

There were also unconfirmed reports that the bipartisan spending cut amendment would be paired with the pending Murray (D-WA) amendment (#110) to add an additional \$25 billion to the bill for infrastructure, including \$13 billion for highways, \$5 billion for mass transit, and \$7 billion for wastewater and drinking water treatment plants.

Majority Leader Reid hopes to pass the bill by the end of the week. However, as always, in the Senate, it's awfully hard to predict exactly how long it will take to pass the bill or the final form the legislation will take.