

TRANSPORTATION WEEKLY

UPDATE – TENTATIVE STIMULUS DEAL HAS ROUGHLY \$48 BILLION FOR U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2009 – 8:00 A.M.

After working through the night for two nights in a row, Congressional staff hope to have the fine print of the \$789.5 billion economic stimulus bill (H.R. 1) finalized by late this morning so that the House and Senate can pass the package by the end of the week.

The staffs of the Appropriations Committees are scheduled to "read through" the bill this morning – to go through the final print of the Appropriations portion of the bill line by line to make sure that the words on the paper match all of the deals that have been struck verbally.

Once that happens, and the tax and health provisions are finalized as well, the conference report will be "filed" in the House and Senate (one of the conferees hands a big stack of paper to the clerk, who logs it in and sends it to GPO for printing). Nothing in the conference report is actually final until the conference report is filed (once filed, the wording of a conference report cannot be changed unless the either the House or Senate votes to send the report back to conference). Repeat: nothing is final until the conference report is filed.

With that important caveat in mind, the draft conference agreement appears to have about \$48 billion in appropriations for the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The conference report is expected to contain \$27.5 billion for

highway and bridge formula funding, a number much closer to the Senate's \$27.06 billion than to the House bill's \$30.00 billion.

The conference report is expected to include a scaled-down version of the Senate's proposed new competitive grant program for surface transportation projects, with an appropriation of \$1.5 billion (down considerably from the \$5.5 billion the Senate proposed).

The conference report is expected to appropriate \$8.4 billion for the Federal Transit Administration – the same total as provided by the Senate bill (well below the \$12.0 billion given to FTA by the House bill). It appears that funding for new starts and fixed guideway modernization grants are included in this \$8.4 billion total – in other words, it's not just formula grants, as the Senate bill proposed.

The conference report is expected to include \$850 million for Amtrak capital grants and a surprise new \$450 million appropriation for Amtrak security upgrades, which for some strange reason is appropriated through the Transportation Department instead of the Homeland Security Department.

The conference agreement is expected to include an appropriation for construction of high-speed rail projects that is stupefyingly large – so big that we are not going to print the number in advance of any actual documentation. You wouldn't believe it anyway.

The conference agreement is expected to accede to the Senate's lower number for airport improvement grants – \$1.1 billion.

No details of conditions of funding are yet available. Once the conference report is filed, the House Rules Committee should have a copy of the text online within 60 to 90 minutes.

It has not yet been announced which chamber will be the first to hold a vote on the conference report.