

CRS Issue Brief for Congress

Received through the CRS Web

Transportation Issues in the 108th Congress

Updated June 9, 2003

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Transportation Issues in the 108th Congress

SUMMARY

This issue brief identifies key transportation issues facing the 108th Congress.

Transportation Budget. Transportation Budget. The Administration has requested \$53.9 billion for the Department of Transportation for FY2004, or 4% less than comparable funding for FY2003 (\$56.1 billion, excluding funds for programs transferred to the Department of Homeland Security in FY2003).

Surface Transportation Reauthorization. Authorizing legislation for the existing federal highway and transit programs will expire at the end of FY2003. The Administration has now released its reauthorization proposal, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003 (SAFETEA), H.R. 2088 and S. 1072. The proposal calls for only minimal increases in program spending over the next six years, and calls for a decrease in year-over-year spending in FY2004. Reauthorization will be considered in the 1st Session of the 108th Congress.

Aviation Reauthorization. The authorization for key functions of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) will expire at the end of FY2003. The FAA has released its proposals for reauthorization. The FAA's bill, the Centennial of Flight Aviation Authorization (FLIGHT-100), provides for essentially flat funding during the next four years. The Aviation Investment and Revitalization Vision Act (AIR-V, S. 824) which proposes a 3-year funding plan totaling \$43.5 billion, has been reported out of committee to the full Senate. In the House, H.R. 2115, Flight 100 – Century of Aviation Reauthorization Act, which has been reported out of committee with amendments, calls for spending \$58.2 billion over 4 years.

Transportation Security. Transportation security continues to be a key policy issue for Congress. The overarching concern is what reasonable security actions can be taken in each transportation mode without excessively impeding commerce and travel. Congress continues to consider legislative proposals to strengthen aviation and surface transportation security.

Amtrak Issues. The 108th Congress will have to reach agreement on the size of Amtrak's annual appropriation. Amtrak has stated that it needs about \$2 billion annually through FY2008. In FY2003, Amtrak is set to receive \$1.05 billion, plus a \$105 million loan repayment extension, which is considerably more than the Administration's FY2003 request of \$521 million. Because Amtrak's authorization expired at the end of FY2002, Congress is also likely to take up reauthorization. In doing so, it may consider the future of the railroad, including Amtrak's long-haul routes.

Airline Industry Turmoil. The war in Iraq and, more recently, the outbreak of a virus known as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) have dramatically affected the airline industry. Air travel has dropped approximately 10% and advance bookings for the months ahead appear to be dropping by about 30%. All of this is happening against the backdrop of the events of September 11th, which also had a huge negative impact on the industry. The airlines lost record amounts of money in 2002, which followed what had been the previous record loss experienced in 2001. Congress has proposed providing some short-term relief for the ailing airline industry.

MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

In May, the Bush Administration released its surface transportation reauthorization proposal, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003 (SAFETEA), H.R. 2088 and S. 1072. The proposal calls for minimal increases in program spending over the next six years, and calls for a decrease in year-over-year spending in FY2004. The Administration proposal's six-year spending level of \$247 billion is well below the stated goals of the leadership of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, \$375 billion, and the leadership of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, \$311 billion.

In April, the FAA released its proposal for reauthorization. The proposal, titled the Centennial of Flight Aviation Authorization (Flight-100) provides for essentially flat funding over the next four years totaling \$57.3 billion. The FAA's bill is largely based on its existing agenda for upgrading airports, modernizing the air traffic system, and enhancing aviation safety. On May 1, 2003, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation convened a mark-up session to review the Senate proposal for FAA reauthorization, the Aviation Investment and Revitalization Vision Act (AIR-V, S. 824) which proposes a 3-year funding plan totaling \$43.5 billion.

For FY2004, the Administration has requested \$53.9 billion for DOT, 4% less than the comparable figure for FY2003 (\$56.1, excluding funds for the Coast Guard and the Transportation Security Administration, which were transferred to the Department of Homeland Security in FY2003). The major difference is a proposed 7% reduction in funding for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), from \$32.6 billion to \$30.4 billion.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

This issue brief provides an overview of key issues on the transportation agenda of the 108th Congress. The issues are organized under the headings of budget, highway and transit reauthorization, aviation reauthorization, transportation security, Amtrak, airline industry financial turmoil, and environmental issues, with the author of each issue identified. Relevant Congressional Research Service (CRS) reports are cited in the text. Consult the CRS Home Page [<http://www.crs.gov/>] or the *Guide to CRS Products*, or call CRS on (202) 707-5700 to obtain the cited reports or identify materials in other subject areas.

Department of Transportation Appropriations

Appropriations for the Department of Transportation (DOT) (Function 400 in the federal budget) provide funding to a variety of programs that include regulatory, safety, research, and construction activities. Money for over half of DOT programs comes from highway fuel taxes, which are credited to the highway trust fund. In turn, the trust fund

supports two accounts: the federal-aid highway account and the mass transit account. Aviation programs are also supported, in part, by fuel taxes but rely more heavily on other user fees such as the airline ticket tax. The DOT annual appropriations also include significant monies from Treasury general-fund revenues.

DOT appropriations for FY2003 were included in the FY2003 Consolidated Appropriations Resolution (H.J.Res. 2/P.L. 108-7) which Congress passed on February 13, 2003 and the President signed on February 20, 2003. It provided a total of \$64.6 billion for the Department of Transportation, \$9.4 billion more than the Administration’s FY2003 request; two major differences were \$8.5 billion more in highway spending and \$529 million more for Amtrak. In an effort to keep total non-defense spending in line with the Administration’s request, the act included a 0.65% across-the-board rescission.

Table 1 shows funding for FY2003, as well as the FY2004 amounts proposed by the Bush Administration and Congressional action to date.

Table 1. Department of Transportation Appropriations*
(for selected agencies, in millions)

Agency	Enacted FY2003	Requested FY2004	House Committee	Senate Committee	Enacted FY2004
Federal Highway Administration	32,417	30,225			
Federal Aviation Administration	13,510	14,007			
Federal Transit Administration	7,179	7,226			
Federal Railroad Administration	1,261	1,089			
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration	434	665			
Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration	313	447			
Maritime Administration	230	219			
Office of the Secretary	172	210			
Office of the Inspector General (OIG)	55	55			
Surface Transportation Board (STB)	18	18			
Budgetary Resources Net Grand Total	55,690	54,266			

Source: Figures in **Table 1** are drawn from *President’s Request with Outlays, FY2004*, a table provided by the House Committee on Appropriations. Due to differing treatments of offsets, rescissions, and the structure of appropriations bills, the figures will at times differ from those in the Administration’s Budget Request. Some figures include offsetting collections. Enacted FY2003 figures reflect the 0.65% across-the-board cut.

* The United States Coast Guard and the Transportation Security Administration were included in the DOT appropriations bill through FY2003; they were transferred to Department of Homeland Security during FY2003 (P.L. 107-296). Since they are no longer included in DOT’s appropriation, their FY2003 numbers are omitted from this table.

The Administration requested \$54.3 billion for DOT for FY2004, 6% more than the comparable amount requested for FY2003¹, and 3% less than the comparable amount enacted

¹ The FY2003 DOT appropriation included the Transportation Security Administration and the United States Coast Guard, which were transferred to the Department of Homeland Security during FY2003 and are not included in DOT’s FY2004 appropriation request; the FY2003 request did not include the Maritime Administration, which is included in DOT’s FY2004 appropriation request.

(continued...)

for FY2003. The major difference between the level enacted for FY2003 and the Administration's FY2004 request is a 7% reduction in funding requested for the Federal Highway Administration. For more information see CRS Report RL31808, *Appropriations for FY2004: Transportation, Treasury, Postal Service, Executive Office of the President, General Government, and Related Agencies*. (CRS contact: D. Randy Peterman)

Surface Transportation Reauthorization

Highway and Transit Program Reauthorization Issues

Authorizing legislation for the existing federal highway, highway safety, and transit programs will expire at the end of FY2003. Reauthorization of these programs is likely to be considered in the 1st Session of the 108th Congress. The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21)(P.L.105-178 & P.L. 105-206) provided for a dramatic increase in funding for federal surface transportation programs. This was in large part the result of a successful effort to link the revenue stream for the highway trust fund to significant increases in spending for the highway, highway safety, and transit programs. The total TEA-21 authorization was about 40% more than the amount that had been authorized in the previous 6-year program authorization. Further, a mechanism created by TEA-21, RABA, has provided the program with an additional \$9.1 billion over TEA-21's 6-year life.

From the public's perspective, the surface transportation reauthorization is taking place against the backdrop of growing concern about congestion and sprawl in urbanized areas, and increased concern about maintaining access to the national system in rural areas. The congressional debate that will take place as part of the highway and transit program reauthorization process in the 108th Congress is shaping up primarily as a debate about money. Given the large increase in funding made available by TEA-21, there appears to be an expectation in some quarters that the reauthorization under discussion should also provide for a large increase in funding. Much of the lobbying in preparation for reauthorization is predicated on the belief that some significant level of new funding can be identified for the highway, highway safety, and transit programs. Given the existing state of the economy and concerns about the costs associated with the war on terrorism, the war with Iraq, and the cost of Iraq's reconstruction, such a conclusion, however, is far from foregone. The Administration, in fact, went on record against major spending increases with its FY2004 budget submission.

The money question aside, there appears to be very little interest in making major changes to the overall structure of the highway, highway safety, and transit programs. Rather, the interest appears to be in tweaking these programs to allow spending for some additional activities and perhaps adding some new stand alone programs or consolidating several traffic safety programs into a single program. Among the issues likely to be considered are: allowing states greater flexibility in how they use their transportation funds;

¹ (...continued)

The Administration's FY2004 request is 14% more than its original FY2003 request, due to the impact the Revenue-Aligned Budget Authority provision had on FHWA's FY2003 authorized funding level. Congress set the FY2003 RABA adjustment to \$0, which effectively increased the amount of funding the Administration's requested for FHWA.

retention of the existing highway trust fund funding framework established by TEA-21; financial assistance for physical infrastructure security; streamlining of environmental evaluations required by the project approval process; a new categorical grant program for highway safety; and an increased focus on reducing drunk driving and increasing seat belt use.

In May 2003, the Bush Administration released its reauthorization proposal, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003 (SAFETEA), H.R. 2088 and S. 1072. The proposal, as expected, calls for minimal increases in program spending over the next six years, and calls for a decrease in year-over-year spending in FY2004. The bill makes some programmatic changes, for example, by creating a consolidated highway safety grant program and by establishing a new program for ready to go highway and transit projects, but otherwise adopts the existing TEA21 structure. The Administration proposal's six-year spending level of \$247 billion is well below the stated goals of the leadership of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, \$375 billion, and the leadership of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, \$311 billion. As a result, it is unlikely that the Administration bill will receive serious congressional consideration. Rather, elements of the Administration proposal will probably be incorporated into the respective House and Senate bills once they are introduced. For more information see: CRS Report RL31665, *Highway and Transit Program Reauthorization*. (CRS contact: John Fischer)

Congestion. There are few individuals living near major urbanized areas who could honestly claim to be unaffected by congestion-caused delays. In the last several decades there have been numerous attempts to reduce traffic congestion, primarily at the state, local, and regional levels. DOT has often provided funding for specific projects, and has offered the expertise of its employees in the battle against congestion. The crux of federal transportation spending, however, has been and continues to be aimed at overall infrastructure improvement, while air quality improvement, congestion improvement, and other issues essentially have been secondary goals. There is a sense that there is no one good solution to congestion problems and that successful congestion reduction strategies require multiple remedies. New infrastructure alone, at the level currently being constructed, has not been able to stay ahead of the congestion problem. Efforts aimed at alleviating congestion by changing individual travel behaviors have also been largely unsuccessful. During the 108th Congress' reauthorization discussion, congestion issues can be expected to play a major role. (CRS contact: John Fischer)

Transit Reauthorization. The Administration's reauthorization proposal, SAFETEA, would make at least 3 significant changes to the federal transit program. First, it would realign FTA programs into 3 groups: Formula Grants, Major Capital Investments, and State-Administered Programs. The stated purpose is to provide transit agencies more flexibility with their federal funding (in part through the redistribution to formula programs of the Bus and Bus Facilities Program's \$607 million in funding, which was completely earmarked in FY2003). Second, it would lower the maximum federal share of costs for New Starts projects from the current 80% to 50%; this is to allow the FTA to provide grants from the available New Starts funding to more projects. Third, the portion of FTA's authorized funding that comes from general fund appropriations—about 18% under SAFETEA—would no longer be guaranteed as it was under TEA-21. This could lead to less funding for FTA than authorized, as well as introducing uncertainty into the financial planning of transit

funding recipients, as prior to the TEA-21 funding guarantee, annual transit appropriations were often less than the amount authorized. For more information, see CRS Report RL31854, *Transit Program Reauthorization in the 108th Congress*. (CRS contact: **D. Randy Peterman**)

Environmental Issues. The use of federal highway funding to mitigate the environmental impacts of surface transportation will be a likely topic of discussion in the reauthorization of TEA-21. The law authorized over \$12 billion for several environmental programs. The majority of this funding was reserved for the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ) to assist states in complying with federal air quality standards. Reauthorization of this program is likely to receive attention due to questions that have been raised as to whether it has made a significant impact on state compliance. Proposals to enhance the program's effectiveness, or to shift its focus away from air quality to reducing traffic congestion in general, may be considered. SAFETEA would retain the basic structure of the CMAQ program and increase the funding level by nearly \$750 million above the previous authorization. It also would revise the funding formula to ensure that states with areas that do not meet stricter federal air quality standards receive greater funding, and would require further study of the program's effectiveness. SAFETEA would continue support for other environmental programs as well, with the exception of the Clean Fuels Formula Grant Program and the Advanced Vehicle Technologies Program which would not be renewed. For more information, refer to CRS Report 98-646 ENR, *Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (P.L. 105-178): An Overview of Environmental Protection Provisions*.

In addition to specific programs, another issue that may arise during reauthorization is whether to take further legislative action to streamline the environmental review process for highway and transit projects. Some Members of Congress have expressed disappointment that the Secretary of Transportation has not finalized regulations to implement the streamlining requirements of TEA-21, and proposals to establish a statutory process to streamline project reviews may be subject to debate. SAFETEA would allow greater participation of project sponsors and states in coordinating the review process, and would provide states with the authority to make certain decisions necessary for project approvals. SAFETEA also would amend current statutory requirements that specify the conditions under which public parks, recreational lands, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic sites may be used for a transportation project. While some argue that these changes would help to increase the pace of project approvals, others believe that environmental protections might be compromised. For more information, refer to CRS Report RS20841, *Environmental Streamlining Provisions in the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century: Status of Implementation*. (CRS contact: **David Bearden**)

Safety Issues. During the first session of the 108th Congress, debate over the purpose, structure, and funding amounts for various highway safety programs is likely to be conducted within the larger context of federal surface transportation reauthorization. With federal highway and traffic safety programs set to expire at the end of FY2003, various interest groups seek additional funding to improve highway infrastructure and operations, increase seat belt use rates, reduce impaired driving, strengthen driver licensing, and improve commercial motor vehicle safety. Some groups seek new safety requirements or fundamental changes in federal transportation safety programs. In the SAFETEA, the Administration proposes major changes in various federal grant programs that directly effect the amount of

and conditions under which funds from the Federal Highway Trust Fund are provided to the states. Key challenges will be finding additional funds to increase federal support for safety and evaluating the costs and benefits of changes in federal policy. Issue areas can be grouped into four categories:

Infrastructure. Billions of dollars derived from federal highway categorical grants are used each year by state and local governments to improve the design, throughput, and overall performance of the highway infrastructure. Collectively, these investments are intended to improve safety. For example, the authorization for the Surface Transportation Program (STP) found in Title I of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), as amended, includes mandatory set asides to eliminate hazards (such as by installing barriers and guard rails) and improve grade crossings (such as by installing signals and signs). Congress will decide the authorization levels for various federal highway categorical grants, the amount (if any) of set asides for safety, and whether a separate categorical grant for safety is established. In SAFETEA, the Administration proposes to eliminate the separate STP safety set aside and to create a separate, apportioned program called the Highway Safety Improvement Program. This program is to address safety problems and opportunities on all roadways in a state and focus resources on the greatest needs as identified through crash data analysis.

Traffic Safety and Associated Grants. Congress will likely decide how much funding to authorize for Section 403 of Title 23 of the U.S. Code, which funds the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) driver/passenger (behavioral) program, and whether funding emphasis and priority setting regarding these activities should be changed. TEA-21 reauthorized two traffic safety grants, and authorized six new grant programs. In retrospect, many state officials maintain that TEA-21 authorized too many traffic safety grants to administer effectively. Not surprisingly, the states seek a unified grant approach with financial rewards for a states' performance. Congress is debating how to structure such a unified traffic safety incentive program, perhaps combining the existing Section 402 (state and community grants), and alcohol countermeasures and occupant protection enhancement grants. In SAFETEA, the Administration proposes a limited consolidation of the existing grant programs and requests funding for two new grant programs, one for emergency medical services and one for state traffic record systems.

Truck and Bus Safety. Key concerns include funding levels for various motor carrier safety enforcement and regulatory activities conducted by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA); grants to enhance the efforts of state enforcement agencies and to improve the Commercial Driver Licensing (CDL) programs conducted by the states; and changes to federal regulations regarding motor carrier safety. Attention is focusing on the issues of: how the Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program could be made a more effective federal/state partnership; how to ensure that CDL grant funds are effectively used; and whether funds administered by the FMCSA should focus more on the role of non-commercial drivers affecting commercial motor vehicle safety.

Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) and Surface Transportation Research. Advances in safety depend partly on investments made to develop and test new technologies to "push the envelope." ITS crash avoidance technologies offer much promise, but substantial costs and lead times before widespread deployment are generally involved. Also, debate is likely to focus on the funding level and purposes of the federal surface

transportation research program and whether to authorize a new Strategic Highway Research Program financed by an administrative takedown off of the federal aid program, and managed by the National Research Council/ Transportation Research Board. In SAFETEA, the Administration is proposing increased funding for both ITS and highway research and development and technology deployment activities.

A recent NHTSA study estimating the costs to society of all traffic crashes at over \$230 billion per year raises questions of whether a sufficient amount of federal funds are allocated to promote traffic safety and whether existing funds are being wisely allocated. Requests for additional funding to enhance safety are likely to be considered within the context of the financial status of the Federal Highway Trust Fund, numerous other requests for alternative use of these funds, and the desire of the states to gain maximum flexibility in the use of federal funds. **(CRS contact: Paul Rothberg)**

Aviation Reauthorization

The Wendell H. Ford Aviation Investment and Reform Act for the 21st Century (FAIR21 or AIR21; P.L. 106-181) provides authorization for key functions of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) through FY2003. Consequently, the 108th Congress has been engaged in the process of drafting and debating legislation to reauthorize the FAA and related aviation programs beyond FY2003.

In April, the FAA released its proposal for reauthorization. The proposal, titled the Centennial of Flight Aviation Authorization (Flight-100) provides for essentially flat funding over the next four years totaling \$57.3 billion. The FAA's bill is largely based on its existing agenda for upgrading airports, modernizing the air traffic system, and enhancing aviation safety. On May 1, 2003, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation convened a mark-up session to review the Senate proposal for FAA reauthorization, the Aviation Investment and Revitalization Vision Act (AIR-V, S. 824) which proposes a 3-year funding plan totaling \$43.5 billion. The bill provides for funding for airport improvements and facilities and equipment that is slightly higher than the Administration's proposal. The bill also provides for significantly higher funding for research, engineering, and development; at about \$300 million per year as compared to the Administration's proposal of about \$100 million per year which would be a sizable cut from enacted fiscal year 2003 appropriations.

The Committee ordered S. 824 to be reported to the full Senate, with amendments. On May 2, 2003, S. 824 was reported in the Senate (Calendar No. 83). On May 15, 2003, H.R. 2115, Flight 100-Century of Aviation Reauthorization Act, was introduced in the House of Representatives following a May 14, 2003, Aviation Subcommittee mark-up meeting on the draft bill. On May 21, 2003, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee convened a mark-up session on H.R. 2115, and ordered the bill reported with amendments. H.R. 2115 would reauthorize the FAA's operations, facilities and equipment, and airport planning components for four years at funding levels slightly higher than those proposed in the Senate bill, totaling \$58.2 billion over 4 years. H.R. 2271, the Second Century of Flight Act, containing details of the FAA research, engineering, and development function, introduced by Rep. Tiahrt on May 22, 2003, proposes a three-year funding plan at levels identical to the Senate bill. It is expected that the House Space and Aeronautics

Subcommittee will hold a mark-up session to review H.R. 2271 in the near future. For a more in-depth discussion of issues related to FAA reauthorization, see CRS Issue Brief IB10121, *Reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration*. **(CRS Contacts: Bart Elias, John Fischer, and Robert Kirk)**

Transportation Security

Since September 11, 2001, transportation security has emerged as a key policy issue for Congress. The 108th Congress is likely to assess a number of proposed security measures and determine if the proposals increase security without excessively impeding commerce and travel. On November 19, 2001, President Bush signed the Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA, P.L. 107-071). The Act established a new Transportation Security Administration (TSA) that is responsible for the security of all modes of transportation, passenger and cargo. On November 25, 2002, President Bush signed the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-296). The Act creates a new cabinet-level Department of Homeland Security which will consolidate the antiterrorist activities of 22 federal agencies and transfer the TSA and the Coast Guard from the DOT to the new department. (See CRS Report RL31549, *Department of Homeland Security: Consolidation of Border and Transportation Security Agencies*).

Aviation Security

ATSA established a timetable for the federalization of security functions at airports with commercial passenger air service. These functions include screening of passengers, carry-on and checked baggage, cargo, mail, and other articles carried aboard passenger aircraft. Other airport security enhancements under ATSA involve improved airport-perimeter security and improved secured-area access control. ATSA also provided for the transfer of a greatly expanded Federal Air Marshal Service to the TSA, and mandated deployment of federal air marshals on every flight that is judged to present a high security risk. ATSA required strengthening of cockpit doors, further limited access to the cockpit, and provided for security training for flight and cabin crew. Over 55,000 federal screeners were hired by TSA and are in place at all 432 passenger airports, including 5 airports participating in a pilot program using federally trained private screeners. TSA is currently downsizing its screener workforce by 6,000 employees and reallocating screeners to better match checkpoint passenger volume at the various airports. Under ATSA, airports may elect to return to a system utilizing private security screeners on November 19, 2004.

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 contained provisions for training and deputizing volunteer pilots of commercial passenger aircraft as federal flight deck officers, allowing them to carry firearms and use force, including lethal force, to protect the flight deck. The initial class was trained in April 2003, and 44 pilots were deputized as federal flight deck officer legislation. TSA was appropriated \$8 million for the program in FY 2003 and is requesting \$25 million to continue the program in FY 2004. While the program is currently limited to pilots of passenger aircraft, legislation (H.R. 765; S. 516; Amendment to S. 165) has been introduced that would allow cargo pilots to participate in the program. The Homeland Security Act of 2002 also established a requirement for crew training in self-defense and cabin security, and completion of a study examining the benefits and risks

associated with arming cabin crew with non-lethal weapons. Further provisions under the Homeland Security Act of 2002 allow the TSA to implement interim alternative baggage screening methods at airports unable to meet a December 31, 2002, deadline for deployment of explosive detection systems and to establish a plan for compliance with requirements to screen all checked baggage with explosive detection systems no later than December 31, 2003.

During the first session of the 108th Congress, attention is expected to be focused on oversight of the aforementioned aviation security initiatives. Key issues include the comparative effectiveness of the federal aviation security workforce, and the effectiveness and efficiency of baggage and cargo screening. Additionally, implementation of in-flight security measures, especially the Federal Flight Deck Officer program, will likely be the subject of congressional scrutiny. Legislation to enhance aviation security, such as the screening and inspection of cargo transported on all-cargo aircraft as well as passenger aircraft, security measures at air cargo shipping facilities, air cargo operations areas, and air cargo acceptance areas has been introduced in both the Senate and the House (S. 165, H.R. 1103). On March 13, 2003, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation ordered S. 165 reported with amendments including an amendment to include all-cargo pilots in the Federal Flight Deck Officer Program.

Another topic under consideration is the use of methods for detecting false or fraudulent transportation worker and passenger identification and technologies to improve the verification and validation of passenger and employee identification. For example, The Aviation Biometric Badge Act (H.R. 115) introduced by Rep. Hefley would require biometric identification of airport security screeners. A related issue that may be addressed during the first session of the 108th Congress is the use of passenger background screening and concerns over the protection of privacy and civil liberties while using methods to identify passengers that may pose security risks. S. 165 contains an amendment proposed by Sen. Wyden that would require DHS and the Attorney General to report to Congress on the impacts of the next-generation Computer Aided Passenger Pre-screening (CAPPS II) program on passenger privacy and civil liberties.

Other issues that may be debated during the first session of the 108th Congress include civil and criminal penalties for interfering with or attempting to circumvent aviation security systems and procedures, and requirements for background checks of individuals seeking to obtain certain types of flight training in the United States. While current regulations require background checks of aliens seeking training in aircraft weighing more than 12,500 pounds, legislation introduced by Senator Bill Nelson (S. 236; Amendment to S. 165) seeks to require background checks for aliens seeking flight training regardless of aircraft weight, but would waive this requirement for applicants who are already qualified to fly aircraft weighing more than 12,500 pounds. Congress may also address the use and effectiveness of temporary flight restrictions to protect airspace, particularly over stadiums during sporting events and other public assemblies, and in the vicinity of certain locations and special events. A provision in the FY2003 consolidated appropriations bill (P.L. 108-7) extends restrictions on stadium overflights during major events for a period of one year and places tighter controls on the issuance of waivers to this restriction.

Legislation (H.R. 580; S. 311) has also been introduced that seeks to protect U.S. airliners from terrorist missiles by installing missile countermeasure systems on aircraft, and

in the interim deploying National Guard and Coast Guard Units to patrol areas near airports. An amendment to S. 165 offered by Sen. Boxer and adopted by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation seeks a study of the shoulder-launched missile threat and recommendations from the Secretary of Homeland Security. (See CRS Report RL31151, *Aviation Security Technology and Procedures: Screening Passengers and Baggage*; CRS Report RL31150, *Selected Aviation Security Legislation in the Aftermath of the September 11 Attack*; and CRS Report RL31741, *Homeland Security: Protecting Airliners from Terrorist Missiles*) (CRS contact: **Bart Elias, Aviation; Dan Morgan, Security Technology**)

Surface Transportation Security

World-wide, roughly one-third of terrorist attacks target transportation systems; the most common transportation mode attacked is public transit. The effectiveness of transit depends on ease of access. As a result, security measures applied in aviation cannot be easily applied to transit. Likewise, the many miles of rail, highway, and pipeline networks are impossible to guard thoroughly. Of particular concern are the daily shipments by rail and truck of hazardous materials (especially flammable and poisonous gases). The overland crossings with Canada and Mexico are also a concern.

The FY2003 Consolidated Appropriations Resolution (H.J.Res. 2/P.L. 108-7) provides \$244.8 million to the Transportation Security Administration for maritime and land security activities, including \$25 million for trucking industry security grants and \$10 million for intercity bus security grants. Surface transportation security legislation will likely be taken up by the 108th Congress. Among the major concerns regarding rail security are the rail tunnels leading to the train stations in New York City, Washington, DC, and Baltimore. The National Defense Rail Act (S. 104) would provide funds for improvements to these tunnels, as well as for an assessment of security risks in rail transportation. The Over-the-Road Bus Security and Safety Act of 2003 (H.R. 875/S. 929) would authorize the Secretary of Transportation to make grants to private bus operators for extraordinary security and safety improvements. (CRS contacts: **D. Randy Peterman, Transit and Passenger Rail; John Frittelli, Freight Railroads; Paul Rothberg, Highways and Pipelines**)

Ports and Maritime Security

Government leaders and security experts are concerned that the maritime transportation system could be used by terrorists to smuggle a weapon of mass destruction into the United States. Experts have found ports to be vulnerable to terrorist attack because of their size, easy accessibility by water and land, proximity to urban areas, and the tremendous amount of cargo that is typically transferred through them.

On November 14, 2002, Congress passed the Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002 (MTSA, P.L. 107-295). The Act creates a U.S. maritime security system and requires federal agencies, ports, and vessel owners to take numerous steps to upgrade security. Some of the major provisions include developing standardized port security plans; conducting vulnerability assessments at each port; creating port security committees at each port to plan and oversee security measures; and establishing background checks and access control to sensitive areas for port workers. A dispute over how to pay for the cost of enhancing seaport security was resolved by eliminating controversial user fee provisions from the conference

report. The 108th Congress may again face questions about how to cover the cost for enhancing port security.

In the 108th Congress, policymakers are debating whether initiatives to fill gaps in port security are proceeding at sufficient pace. They are also reviewing the implementation of the port security provisions in MTSA. Some of the broader policy issues likely to be debated include finding the best way to strike a balance between port security and port, or trade, efficiency. For example, what is the best way to ensure that cargo containers are not used to smuggle terrorist weapons or terrorists themselves without disrupting the flow of legitimate commerce. Another challenge is finding the right balance between standardized versus site-specific security measures. A key question is what elements of seaport security might be best addressed through a standardized, top-down approach, and what elements of seaport security might be best addressed through a tailored, bottom-up approach.

Congress is also likely to consider how much of the potential solution lies in international actions and the implications these actions may have for U.S. agencies and port operations. The International Maritime Organization recently adopted international standards for vessel and port security and the World Customs Organization is working towards adopting standards for cargo security. Improving seaport security will require effective cooperation between all levels of government – federal, state, and local – as well as between government agencies and private sector entities. The proper division of roles between all of these interests and how to ensure their cooperation is an important issue for U.S. policymakers. (See CRS Report RL31733, *Port and Maritime Security: Background and Issues for Congress.*) (CRS contact: John Frittelli)

Amtrak Issues

Amtrak does not earn enough revenue or receive enough federal assistance to cover its operating and capital needs. Amtrak revenues are around \$2 billion a year, but it spends nearly \$3 billion a year, producing operating deficits of almost \$1 billion in recent years. In addition, it has around \$3 billion in long-term debt and capital lease obligations, and nearly \$6 billion in backlogged capital maintenance work. The Amtrak Reform Council and the DOT Inspector General's Office have both estimated that Amtrak, as currently structured, requires around half a billion in operating support and around a billion in capital spending annually, a considerably higher level of funding than Amtrak has ever consistently received.

The Omnibus Appropriations bill for FY2003 (P.L. 108-7/H.J.Res. 2) provided \$1.043 billion for Amtrak (after the 0.65% across-the-board rescission), plus a \$105 million loan repayment extension. This was considerably more than the Administration's FY2003 request of \$521 million. In a press release, Amtrak stated that "the funding level should be sufficient to operate the national system for the remainder of the fiscal year." However, in a March 13, 2003 hearing, the DOT Inspector General cautioned that lower than projected revenues for Amtrak in recent months raise the possibility of another Amtrak cash crisis before the end of the current fiscal year.

In a change of policy, Congress directed (in P.L. 108-7) that Amtrak funding not go directly to Amtrak; instead, funding is allocated to the Secretary of Transportation, who will make quarterly grants to Amtrak. P.L. 108-7 also provides for tighter control over Amtrak's

activities by requiring Amtrak to submit capital and operating plans to Congress and the Secretary; Amtrak may not spend money on projects not in the plans, and must submit changes to the plans to Congress, with justifications. With limited exceptions, Amtrak will have to follow DOT guidelines for reprogramming funding. Before the Secretary can release any funds to Amtrak, Amtrak must agree to continue to abide by provisions of the loan agreement of June 28, 2002, including financial reporting requirements and the identification of \$100 million in cost saving options for 2003. The Secretary will also have to vouch for the accuracy of financial information that Amtrak reports to Congress.

In June 2002, DOT Secretary Mineta proposed a set of principles for Amtrak reform, including the elimination of Federal operating support; separation of ownership of the Northeast Corridor infrastructure from train operations; introduction of competition for certain routes; and shared responsibility for passenger rail financing between the Federal government and the states. In testimony before the Senate Commerce Committee (April 29, 2003) and the Railroad Subcommittee of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee (April 30, 2003), DOT Deputy Secretary Michael Jackson expanded on these principles, saying that the Administration's plan for Amtrak reauthorization would be presented to Congress this summer. The Administration's proposed reforms are extensive and controversial, and are expected to figure in the debate over Amtrak reauthorization.

In January 2003, Amtrak's president said that the corporation needs \$2 billion annually through FY2008. In early February, the Bush Administration requested \$900 million for Amtrak for FY2004, or \$1.1 billion less than Amtrak says it needs. On February 20, 2003, Amtrak requested \$1.8 billion in federal capital and operating subsidies for FY2004, with \$1.04 billion in support for capital needs and \$768 million for operations.

As required by its FY2003 appropriation, Amtrak submitted a 5-year Strategic Plan to Congress on April 25, 2003. This plan would maintain the current network and begin to address Amtrak's estimated \$6 billion backlog of maintenance. The plan calls for an average of \$1.6 billion annually in federal assistance to Amtrak over FY2004-FY2008.

Amtrak's authorization expired at the end of FY2002. Reauthorization proposals introduced in the 108th Congress include S. 104 (Hollings), which would authorize significant increases in funding for Amtrak, with detailed allocations of funding to specific purposes. Senator McCain is expected to introduce reauthorization legislation; in the second session of the 107th Congress he introduced S. 1958, which would have restructured Amtrak along the lines proposed in the Amtrak Reform Council's plan, *An Action Plan for the Restructuring and Rationalization of the National Intercity Rail Passenger System*, February 7, 2002, available at [<http://www.amtrakreformcouncil.gov>]. No legislation has yet been introduced embodying the Administration's principles for Amtrak reauthorization. For more information on Amtrak, see CRS Report RL31743, *Amtrak Issues in the 108th Congress*. (CRS contact: D. Randy Peterman.)

Airline Industry Financial Turmoil

The War in Iraq and, and more recently, the outbreak of a virus known as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), have dramatically affected the airline industry. Air travel in March and April, dropped significantly according to the Air Transport Association (ATA).

In early June, with the war over, there are some hopeful signs that traffic is returning, but no one in the industry is expecting a full traffic recovery in 2003. All of these developments are happening against the backdrop of the events of September 11th, which continues to have a huge negative impact on the industry. The airlines lost record amounts of money in 2002, which followed what had been the previous record loss experienced in 2001.

Among major airlines, only Southwest was profitable in 2002, and Southwest is the only major carrier believed to have a shot at profitability in 2003. The industry's second largest airline United, is operating in receivership and the possibility exists that other carriers could find themselves in this position in the near future (Hawaiian, for example, recently filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy). There is, therefore, considerable concern that the airline industry as we have known it over the last few years is likely to go through a period of major structural change, which has yet to fully play out. Throughout this period the airline industry has come to Congress seeking assistance, by way of tax relief or other means, in order to keep flying.

After September 11th, Congress and the Bush Administration moved swiftly to provide the airline industry with \$15 billion in federal financial support (Air Transportation Safety and System Stabilization Act (Stabilization Act)(P.L. 107-42). The first \$5 billion provided direct aid to pay for industry losses associated with the results of the September 11th attacks. The vast majority of these funds have already been distributed to the airlines (a listing of airlines receiving funds is available from the Department of Transportation at [<http://ostpxweb.dot.gov/aviation>]). A second source of funding, access to \$10 billion in government backed loans, required approval by the newly created Air Transportation Stabilization Board (ATSB). Thirteen airlines applied for the loan program. The majority received some form of assistance, but the largest single applicant, United, was denied a loan. Of the \$10 billion authorized by this program only about \$1.5 billion has been committed.

In the FY2003 Emergency Wartime Supplemental (P.L. 108-11)(April 12, 2003), Congress has again provided the industry with short term relief. Specifically, the Act provides \$2.3 billion in immediate assistance to reimburse air carriers for security expenses (Transportation Security Administration press release: [<http://www.tsa.gov/public/display?theme=44&content=230>]). It also provides the air carriers with an additional \$100 million to reimburse them for expenses involved in hardening cockpit doors and gives the industry a four month tax holiday beginning June 1, 2003 during which the passenger and airline security fees will not be collected. Notwithstanding this assistance, there are many observers who believe that this aid will be insufficient to keep all U.S. airlines solvent. Rather it is the hope that this assistance will buy the industry time and that an economic recovery later this year will restore the industry to some semblance of health. (CRS contact: John Fischer)

Environmental Issues

Conformity

Under the Clean Air Act, areas that have not attained any of the six National Ambient Air Quality Standards established by EPA must develop State Implementation Plans (SIPs)

demonstrating how they will reach attainment. As of December 2002, 107 areas with a combined population of 97.8 million people were subject to the SIP requirements. Section 176 of the Clean Air Act prohibits federal agencies from funding projects in these areas unless they “conform” to the SIPs. Specifically, projects must not “cause or contribute to any new violation of any standard,” “increase the frequency or severity of any existing violation,” or “delay timely attainment of any standard.” Because new highways generally lead to an increase in emissions, both the statute and regulations require that an area’s Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) provide a new demonstration of conformity no less frequently than every three years. Highway and transit projects cannot receive federal funds unless they are part of a conforming TIP.

As a result of growth of emissions from SUVs and other light trucks, greater than expected increases in vehicle miles traveled, recent court decisions that tightened conformity rules, and the scheduled implementation of more stringent air quality standards in 2004, the impact of conformity requirements is expected to grow in the next several years. Numerous metropolitan areas will face a cutoff of highway and transit funds unless they impose sharp reductions in vehicle and industrial emissions. The Clean Air Act provides no authority for waivers or grace periods; and, during a conformity lapse, only a limited set of exempt projects (mostly safety-related or replacement and repair of existing transit facilities) can be funded. The rules do not allow funding of new projects that might reduce emissions, such as new transit lines. These factors, as well as the need for better coordination between the TIP and SIP planning cycles, may be raised by those seeking to amend the conformity provisions. Modifying conformity would be controversial, however, since it provides one of the most effective tools for ensuring that transportation and air quality planning are coordinated. Conformity provisions have been introduced in the Administration’s highway and transit legislation (H.R. 2088 / S. 1072); Section 6001 of the bill would require conformity demonstrations every 5 years instead of every three, and would shorten the planning horizon over which conformity must be demonstrated to 10 years in most cases, instead of the current 20 years. **(CRS Contact: Jim McCarthy)**

Diesel Engines and Fuel

New emission standards for highway diesel engines took effect October 1, 2002, but 6 of the 7 engine manufacturers that serve the U.S. market were unable to certify a compliant engine by the October deadline. All seven have now certified at least one compliant engine, according to EPA, but until they obtain certification for all of their engines, they are subject to non-conformance penalties that vary depending on the size of the engine and the amount by which its emissions exceed the standard. Far more stringent standards will take effect in the 2007 model year, and the manufacturers generally argue that they will be unable to meet these standards as well. Diesel fuel will be subject to new standards beginning in 2006; these may pose difficulty for some refiners, and could add to the cost of diesel fuel. EPA and a Federal Advisory Committee Act panel have both reviewed the engine and fuel standards and concluded that they are achievable; but given the importance of diesel engines and fuel to the nation’s economy, Congress may conduct its own oversight of diesel-related issues. **(CRS Contacts: Jim McCarthy and Brent Yacobucci)**

Alternative Fuels and Vehicles

Several federal laws, including TEA-21, have requirements and/or provide incentives for the use of alternative fuels and vehicles. Within TEA-21, the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Program provides funding for state and local initiatives to reduce air pollution. Eligible initiatives include the purchase of alternative fuels and vehicles, as well as the development of alternative fuel infrastructure. TEA-21 allows for other incentives, including permitting states to exempt alternative fuel vehicles from HOV restrictions. Outside of TEA-21 reauthorization, the Bush Administration has made research and development of fuel cell vehicles and hydrogen fuel a priority. In January 2002, the Administration announced the FreedomCAR program, which increases federal research on fuel cell vehicles. In January 2003, the Administration announced the FreedomFuel program, which complements FreedomCAR and increases research funding for hydrogen fuel. Alternative fuels—especially hydrogen—and vehicles will play a key role in the debate over a comprehensive energy policy. On April 11, 2003, the House passed H.R. 6, which (among other provisions) mandates the use of renewable fuel in gasoline, and provides funding for hydrogen research, grants for advanced buses, and tax incentives for fuel cell vehicles. The Senate energy bill, S. 14, is currently being debated; many provisions of S. 14 are similar to those in H.R. 6. For additional discussion, see CRS Report RL30484, *Alternative Transportation Fuels and Vehicles*, and CRS Report RL30758, *Advanced Vehicle Technologies*. **(CRS Contact: Brent Yacobucci)**.