



The Latest News and Updates from TIA's Government Affairs Department



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Walsh Meets With Railroads and Unions

In an effort to avert a labor strike, the top rail carriers in the nation, the National Mediation Board (NMB), and eight unions met on Wednesday. A Department of Labor (DOL) spokesperson confirmed that Labor Secretary Marty Walsh attended the meeting.

How seriously the Biden administration is treating the possibility of a railroad strike—which might happen as soon as next week—can be seen by the NMB's engagement and now Walsh's. It's also a clue that the White House may have had high hopes for the progress of contract negotiations between the companies and the groups that represent their roughly 150,000 workers.

Once the so-called cooling-off period expires on September 16th and unionization takes effect, negotiators will meet once more with the NMB on Thursday and Friday in the hopes of reaching a provisional deal. TIA will keep you updated on this issue.

Cantwell Frustrated With Amtrak

In light of the delays in the resumption of Amtrak service in her state, Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA) informed five candidates for the Amtrak board of directors—including the current board chair—that she won't support their nominations unless they commit to develop a "workforce strategy."

"What we need — what I need — before I can support any of the nominees before us today is a commitment for us to come up with a workforce strategy and plan that allows us to continue," Cantwell said. "We cannot simply say, 'we don't have enough conductors; we don't have enough baggage handlers.'"

Context: Due to the pandemic, service between Seattle, Vancouver, and British Columbia, has been discontinued since 2020 because of pandemic constraints. The lack of labor is currently the main issue delaying the return to service. Cantwell noted how Montana has experienced similar service snarls.

"What was the topic? It dealt with conductors. Then, what was the subject? Obtaining a schedule for the conductors and making it function," added Cantwell. And now we're announcing we're putting the Seattle to Vancouver route on hold once more due to lacking luggage handlers on Canadian territory.

Tony Coscia, the current chair of the Amtrak Board, was first hesitant to award Cantwell a firm restart date for Cascades Service despite Amtrak announcing last week that service would resume Sep. 26th, saying that Amtrak's "expectation is that by the end of the year that would happen." He hoped it would be sooner but acknowledged labor shortages and other workforce issues.

Cantwell was not satisfied with what she heard. "Everybody in America has workforce issues."

Urgency to work on workforce issues – now we're talking. "What I didn't hear enough of is what does Amtrak believe they need to do about that to get the services reestablished that we need in America?" she said, noting that until that moment, none of the nominees had brought up workforce concerns, which she said were "the critical issue." "The public believes they survived the pandemic," she added. "So now they want to see the services restored."

No markup for the nominees has been scheduled. TIA will update you accordingly.



New York Congestion Pricing

Some of the largest cities in the world continue to use tolls as a straightforward method to decrease traffic, lower pollution, and generate much-needed income.

Urban drivers are being taxed everywhere, from Stockholm to Singapore, and it's working. Local politics have stopped places like San Francisco and Los Angeles from so-called congestion pricing.

In New York, Kathy Hochul is fully behind implementing the plan, but her New Jersey neighbors are not so sure that congestion pricing is a wise move. A Bronx congressman says the plan would burden low-income communities with more truck traffic and pollution. And New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy feels so strongly that he's issued an escalating series of threats, even saying he could halt the operation through a key bi-state agency. "It's not going to happen," Murphy has said of the plan. "If we have to, we've got options, which I don't want to use, but we can use through the Port Authority."

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority has been threatened with "defunding," and Rep. Josh Gottheimer (D-N.J.) has presented with Rep. Nicole Malliotakis (R-NY) of Staten Island legislation to terminate the program, which needs federal approval.

However, congestion pricing is effective, and New York must address the issue if it wants to set the standard on this side of the Atlantic. According to a specialist with the public transit agency of London, which put into effect a comparable initiative in 2003, there was backlash. "You weren't just trying to manipulate the market through price. You were attempting to alter people's travel habits in order to make them more sustainable," Christina Calderato, head of transportation strategy and policy at Transport for London said in an interview.

By charging (monetarily) automobiles who enter Manhattan below 60th Street, Hochul hopes to collect money and ease gridlock. A 2019 law that approved the scheme also stipulates that it must produce \$1 billion annually while exempting emergency cars, vehicles that transport persons with disabilities, and local residents who earn less than \$60,000 per year.

Now that there are more exceptions, authorities must balance how much to tax and who else to exempt. They know that as carveouts increase, so must the costs for those who must pay. A group of six people known as the Traffic Mobility Review Board will finally put up the final arrangement, which needs to be approved by the MTA board.

Transit leaders this week concluded six public hearings on the legally mandated environmental evaluation of the plan, which considers the effects of tolls ranging from \$9 to \$23 for passenger vehicles and from \$12 and \$82 for trucks, were concluded this week by transit leaders. By early in the following year, the Biden administration might decide whether to permit state officials to proceed.