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Fresno Council of Governments

One Voice

May 4-9, 2019

Meetings Summary

Monday,
May 6th

10:00 a.m. Congressional Roundtable with Chiefs of Staff or Legislative Directors

Office of U.S. Representative Jim Costa (CA-16)

Jared Feldman, Legislative Director

Office of U.S. Representative TJ Cox (CA-21)

Jared Henderson, Legislative Director

Office of U.S. Representative Tom McClintock (CA-04)

Chris Tudor, Chief of Staff

Office of U.S. Representative Devin Nunes (CA-22)

Ian Foley, Legislative Director

- The group thanked staff members Ian Foley and Jared Feldman for Congressman Nunes and Congressman Costa respectively, for the Members' support of the City of Fresno's INFRA grant application seeking federal assistance for the Veterans Boulevard project
 - The two Members signed a joint letter of support for the project located along the physical boundary line splitting their Congressional districts
 - Both made calls to the U.S. Department of Transportation
 - We encouraged them to follow up with Secretary Chao or her staff at the agency in the weeks ahead as the review process moves forward to project selection
- Congressman McClintock's Chief of Staff Chris Tudor said his boss will generally support grant applications in hopes of his constituents receiving federal investments if that money is already on the table and appropriated for grants
- Jared Henderson said that water infrastructure is Congressman Cox's biggest priority for infrastructure reform

- The group agreed that we need to streamline environmental permitting processes in any forthcoming infrastructure package or the surface transportation reauthorization
- Chris Tudor expressed frustrations that the Administration's Regional Offices had not moved forward with implementing critical reforms included in recently passed legislation that would help address maintenance backlog on federal public lands in the region
- The offices are glad to provide support for any forthcoming grant applications for the Regional Fire Training Center or the Transportation Training Facilities

11:00 a.m. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works (EPW)

James R. Willson, Majority Counsel, Chairman John Barrasso (R-WY)

Steve Barnett, Majority Professional Staff, Chairman John Barrasso (R-WY)

Juli Huynh, FHWA Detailee, Majority Staff

- Senate Committee on the Environment and Public Works (EPW) is focused a putting together a reauthorization of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act (Pub. L. No. 114-94)
 - They are not working on a broad infrastructure package like the House
 - The Committee started the reauthorization process with a hearing last November
 - The Committee began putting together priorities in January
 - From February to March, they compiled Senators' requests and are reviewing them now
 - They are trying to get a bill out of committee by the August recess to advance to a full vote later this year
- EPW was not consulted on the \$2 trillion figure discussed by President Donald Trump, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi
- EPW staff believe that a \$1 trillion package is more likely
- The Committee staff are "blocking out the press, trying to keep costs down, and working with the Senate Finance Committee" to find alternative revenue streams to fund the package aside from raising the gas tax
- They indicated that a climate title could appear in their bill, seeking to curb carbon emissions from the transportation sector
 - In response to a question from Jen; they said that Senator Tom Carper's *Clean Corridors Act* may be added to the bill in some form
- Senate EPW Chairman John Barrasso prefers the formula structure for allocating funds
 - The Committee is reviewing those allocations and working to determine whether or not more resources should be targeted to the local level rather than to state Departments of Transportation
- The Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) Grant Program could receive increased investments in a reauthorization

- Other priorities include increased funding for bridge repairs and replacements
- They are considering expanding 23 U.S.C. § 504 eligibility for job training
- EPW Committee staff said that the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Highway Construction Workforce Pilot might be a good fit for the transportation planning facility, and they are trying to build on that program for the infrastructure package
- They suggested Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) training programs at the National Fire Academy (NFA) in response to the regional fire training center priority
- EPW is looking at stronger emergency preparedness provisions in the infrastructure package
- Robert asked about the Committee staff for their response to the Administration's proposed Safer Affordable Fuel Efficient (SAFE) Vehicles Proposed Rule for Model Years 2021-2026
 - The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) propose to amend certain existing Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) and greenhouse gas emissions standards for passenger cars and light trucks and establish new standards, covering model years 2021 through 2026.
 - EPW responded that they are aware of the issue and potential issues that may arise for project sponsors and grant administrators in California
- David asked if broadband might be included in the infrastructure package
 - Committee staff replied that they will strive to streamline project permitting to allow for broadband investments where it could be included

1:30 p.m. U.S. Department of Transportation
Office of Congressional and Government Affairs
Deputy Assistant Secretary Anne Reike
Michael Russo, Government Affairs Officer
Sean Poole, Government Affairs Officer
Federal Aviation Administration
Jana Lozano, Senior Congressional Liaison Specialist

- Regarding the Veterans Boulevard project, the Department staff advised that FresnoCOG ensure that the City should follow any guidance and recommendations from they received in the formal debriefing
- The Department noted that the most recent application looks really good and it appears that the City of Fresno has incorporated elements that clearly demonstrate how this project would advance goals shared with the Administration in regard to goods movement, economic competitiveness, congestion mitigation, and leverage of nonfederal resources

- The Department staff noted that letters of support and calls from Members of Congress to Secretary Chao are critical to “getting across the finish line” for grant applications
- They also indicated that it really helps to have an application with a robust local cost share, like Veterans Boulevard
- For the Cross Valley rail station, Deputy Secretary Reike recommended having a discussion with public and private partners regarding the use of the 45G tax credit for short line railroads
- LeeAnn provided an overview of the transportation training facilities
 - The Department was very receptive to this project
 - The Department indicated that the project could be a good candidate for a designation as a supervisory leadership centers of excellence, which could help pave the way for other future federal funding opportunities
- In response to the FAA pilot training discussion, the Department said that workforce initiatives are a priority for inclusion in their FY 2020 appropriations requests
- The Department staff said their “hands are tied statutorily” in terms of raising the Passenger Facilities Charge, but the Department will not oppose an increase and they look forward to implementing whatever policy that Congress legislates
- On the infrastructure package, they expressed some skepticism for the publicly-discussed figure of \$2 trillion following Speaker Pelosi’s meeting with President Trump since there is no proposed revenue solution
- The Department sincerely hopes that Congressional leaders find a revenue solution that will “spur up to \$1-2 trillion” of infrastructure investment, although they did not offer clarity regarding whether or not that final number would include state and local nonfederal match
- They hope that the House can produce a bill that could be accepted by the Senate
- The Department looks forward to enacting the “will of Congress”
- The reauthorization of the *FAST Act* is the top priority for DOT, which is a more likely vehicle for broader infrastructure reform
 - The Department thinks it is important for the *FAST Act* to be reauthorized long-term, possibly beyond five years, to provide certainty for units of State and local government and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) like FresnoCOG

3:00 p.m. House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee

Chairman Peter DeFazio (D — OR 04)

Kristine O’Brien, Director of Outreach and Member Services, Majority Staff

- Kristine said that workforce development needs to be part of the upcoming infrastructure package

- Ideally, Congress would add to or improve upon existing apprenticeship programs rather than replace them all together
- Chairman DeFazio is an avid supporter of lifting the cap on the Passenger Facilities Charge to fund airport improvements, but the Committee has not settled on a specific number
 - Airlines are opposing this proposal, so the COG's advocacy is helpful
 - Kristine said that Chairman DeFazio will be introducing legislation on this issue soon
 - The hope is to include that bill as one piece to raise revenues in a broader infrastructure package
- Kristine said that the Regional Fire Training Center is probably best handled by the Fresno area Congressional delegation and encouraged them to draft legislation in support of the initiative
- On the infrastructure package, Chairman DeFazio is looking at a number of revenue solutions including the federal gas tax and other user fees like vehicle miles traveled, etc.
- House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee is drafting their legislative proposals at a slower pace than their counterparts on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee
- In the meantime, the T&I Committee is working independently on legislation regarding Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, Passenger Facilities Charge, clean water, and surface transportation

4:30 p.m. U.S. Department of Agriculture U.S. Forest Service
Patti Hiram, Deputy Chief for State and Private Engagement
Tony Edwards, Legislative Affairs Specialist
Doug Crandall, Director of Legislative Affairs
Alice Ewen, National Program Manager, National Urban & Community Forestry

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) staff said that a potential regulatory challenge with the Central Valley Conservation Corps proposal is the issue of where to put the dead wood after it has been collected
- The Department is expanding its Shared Stewardship initiative to fight forest fires
 - They anticipate that an agreement with the State of California is coming soon
 - They encouraged local governments to engage with the state partners and stay involved in those discussions in order to be included in Shared Stewardship or Good Neighbor agreements
- The Department stated that the Forest Service likely does not have the funding to invest capital in a Regional Fire Training Center, but they referred FresnoCOG to FEMA instead as a potential funder

- The Department said that there are federal programs to support state and local fire departments through the state forestry office
 - The Federal Excess Personal Property (FEPP) Program is one example
- In sum, USDA suggested a number of workarounds and indirect funding streams for the regional fire training center and that FresnoCOG should get in touch with their state forester

Tuesday,
May 7th

9:00 a.m. U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Federal Emergency Management Agency
Danielle Shelton, Fire Program Specialist, Grant Programs Directorate
Tony Faison, Branch Chief, AFG, Grant Programs Directorate
Jacob Spell, Intergovernmental Affairs, External Affairs
Adam Clay Shapiro, Intergovernmental Affairs Specialist

Participating via conference call:

Katie Grasty, Senior Hazard Mitigation Specialist Region 9
Casey Deshong, Intergovernmental Affairs, External Affairs, Region 9

- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) staff helped move a resolution to the forestry corps issue
 - FEMA disagreed with the “contingent activity” response from the state agency
 - FresnoCOG should let the state know that they’ve spoken to FEMA about the issue
 - FEMA says that they should be eligible for that funding
 - FEMA will reach out to the state agency and ask them to reconsider their decision
 - Blake will follow up with a letter to that effect
 - FEMA suggested that FresnoCOG add tree removal to the scope of work of their next application
- Construction activities are ineligible for funding under FEMA’s fire grants; their funding is more about tangential activities, like training components and code enforcement
- FEMA staff suggested that FresnoCOG look at the Natural Resources Conservation Service for potential funding
- FEMA ended the meeting with some general guidance on federal grant applications – find the right program match, read the Notice of Funding Opportunity, and use brevity in the narrative

10:30 a.m. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee

Ranking Member Sam Graves (R — MO-06)

Abigail Camp, Director of Coalitions and Operations, Professional Minority Staff
Johanna Hardy, Staff Director, Subcommittee on Economic Development

- On the infrastructure package, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Minority staff stated that Ranking Member Sam Graves is waiting on Chairman DeFazio and the Majority to move forward with a proposal
- Minority staff are currently in the “listening and learning phase” of the process, engaging with appropriate stakeholders like FresnoCOG
 - They suggested that FresnoCOG send any priorities via email at tistakeholders@mail.house.gov
- In response to LeeAnn’s overview of the Transportation Training Facilities, the Committee staff highlighted their jurisdiction over the Economic Development Administration (EDA)
 - There have been discussions about how to modernize the mission and programs administered by EDA
- Staff indicated it may be difficult to lift the cap and raise the Passenger Facilities Charge
 - They cited opposition from low-cost airlines
 - FresnoCOG delegates responded that the increased capital investments in local airport infrastructure would directly benefit those exact airlines
 - Committee staff inquired about the airlines’ private sector contributions to Fresno-Yosemite International Airport’s \$202 million capital investment program
 - The delegation responded that the program is being financed through local public resources with insufficient support from the private sector
- Abigail and Johanna expressed interest in helping FresnoCOG push back on the Central Valley Forestry Corps
- Committee’s minority leadership is open to push reforms on fire prevention activities
- They are currently exploring holistic reforms for federal spending on disaster mitigation and relief
- The Committee prefers to make investments in mitigation activities rather than disaster relief after the fact

11:30 a.m. U.S. Department of Interior
Office of Intergovernmental and External Affairs
Timothy Williams, Principal Deputy Director
Carly Miller, Deputy Director
Cynthia Moses-Nedd, Liaison to State and Local Government (Career)
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks
Aurelia Skipwith, Deputy Assistant Secretary
National Park Service

Chuck Laudner, Executive Director for Congressional and Legislative Affairs

- The Department staff said that infrastructure reform is the agency's top legislative priority
- Interior will put FresnoCOG in contact with Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to help for further discussion regarding the Regional Fire Training Center
- The Fish and Wildlife Service has been trying to build more partnerships on fire mitigation on public lands, especially where and where any endangered species are involved
- Interior officials suggested that the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) could be a useful model for the Fresno Regional Fire Training Center
- In response to the Central Valley Conservation Corps proposal, Interior has been advocating for NEPA streamlining and administrative categorical exclusions (CEs)
 - They submitted a suite of requests on this issue for the FY 2020 appropriations cycle
 - There is a new CE for up to 10,000 acres of federal land located along critical Right-of-Way or access roads
- Interior is developing a state partnership pilot for hazardous tree removal in California
 - They advised FresnoCOG to engage with the CA BLM director for "front end of fire" issues and maybe work on a pilot partnership program
- Interior also seeks to further utilize Good Neighbor authority to assist active forest management work
- Interior is trying to ensure consistency across its Field Offices with regard to fire resources
- Interior's other major priority is reforming the *Endangered Species Act (ESA)*

3:00 p.m. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)
Trevor Higgins, Legislative Assistant
Joe Petrzela, Legislative Assistant

- The group briefed Senator Feinstein and her staff on the City of Fresno's Veterans Boulevard project
 - The Senator wanted to understand how the project would be funded, what was required of her to appropriately support the project, and who are the other project sponsors competing for this funding within the State of California
 - There were 16 grant applications submitted by project sponsors in California, including the application submitted by the City of Fresno
 - We learned that a \$50 million seismic retrofit project for the Golden Gate Bridge is a competitor of the Veterans Boulevard project

- Senator Feinstein was concerned that DOT would see the Golden Gate project as a greater priority
 - We explained that DOT is allowed to award up to \$100 million in funding per State in this round of the INFRA Grant Program; therefore, the Senator could support both projects at their requested federal funding levels and leave up to \$25 million more on the table for other projects in California
- Senator Feinstein believes that the State of California should fund the Central Valley Conservation Corps project, rather than the federal government
- Senator Feinstein committed to supporting the Regional Fire Training Center and the Transportation Training Facilities, if any future grant applications are forthcoming
 - Please reach out to the Senator's staff with any requests for letters of support
- Senator Feinstein is supportive of raising the Passenger Facilities Charge
 - She will continue advocating for lifting the cap and increasing the charge

*Trevor Higgins' last day in Senator Feinstein's office was Friday, May 17, 2019. The DC Office is currently reviewing candidates to fill this vacancy. We will let you know when a new staff member has filled the legislative position.

4:30 p.m. Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA)
Ike Irby, Legislative Assistant

- Ike indicated that Senator Harris supports raising the Passenger Facilities Charge and understands the need for increased revenues to finance airport improvements
- The group offered thanks for Senator's support for the City of Fresno's INFRA Grant Program application seeking federal assistance for the Veterans Boulevard project
 - Ike will do a "staff flag" for the Veterans Boulevard project
- Ike asked FresnoCOG to send him letter language for the DOT uniform hiring issue
- Ike asked FresnoCOG Deputy Director Robert Phipps to provide him with a recap of the EPA meeting on the SAFE Vehicle proposed rulemaking
- Ike told us that Senator Harris will soon be introducing legislation on electric school buses and asked for FresnoCOG's endorsement

Wednesday,
May 8th

9:30 a.m. U.S. Representative TJ Cox (D – CA 21)
1728 Longworth House Office Building

- A small group of 10 delegates met with Congressman Cox and his Legislative Assistant Fabiola Rodriguez
- His 21st Congressional District includes all of Kings County and it extends into portions of Fresno, Kern, and Tulare Counties
- Congressman Cox serves on the House Committee on Agriculture and the House Committee on Natural Resources
 - The Agriculture Committee has jurisdiction over renewable energy, rural development, nutrition, crop insurance, conservation, international trade, futures market regulation, animal and plant health, agricultural research and development, bioterrorism, forestry
 - The Natural Resources Committee has jurisdiction over federal conservation projects, energy and mineral resource management, our national parks and public lands, endangered species preservation, and water management
 - Congressman Cox has invited Natural Resources Committee Chairman Raúl M. Grijalva (D-Ariz.) to the Central Valley
 - The Congressman and Chairman will visit Friant
 - Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife Chairman Jared Huffman is also invited
 - The Subcommittee is responsible for overseeing the agencies that manage America's water resources, hydropower development, and federal transmission lines
- Congressman Cox serves as Vice Chair on Rural Poverty on Majority Leader Steny Hoyer's Task Force on Poverty and Opportunity for the 116th Congress
- Congressman Cox invited U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Perdue to visit the 21st District
- Congressman Cox expressed support for the Veterans Boulevard project
 - He would be glad to sign onto any future letters of support for the City of Fresno's grant applications for it
- Regarding immigration, Congressman Cox expects a committee markup on a DACA bill in the next few weeks with a full House vote tentatively scheduled for August
- His biggest legislative priorities include water infrastructure; trade policy and the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA); and immigration.
- Congressman Cox supports the appropriations request of \$775 million for the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Program and he supports its reauthorization
- Congressman Cox also supports maintaining level appropriations for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program
- Congressman Cox wants to see the Small Business Administration (SBA) better utilize the Rural Affairs Office to push more capital lending toward rural communities and their needs
- Congressman Cox met with Kevin Meikle, Director of Aviation for the Fresno-Yosemite International Airport, to discuss lifting the cap on the Passenger Facilities Charge (PFC) back in March
 - He is supportive of lifting the cap and increasing the maximum fee

- Congressman Cox is supporting of appropriating funding for the FAA grant programs for pilot training as included in the reauthorization bill
- Congressman Cox asked us to follow up with Fabiola regarding any Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 appropriations requests or future requests for letters of support for grants

12:30 p.m. The White House

Office of Intergovernmental Affairs

William Crozer, Special Assistant to the President and Deputy Director

James C. Akin, Associate Director

- The group discussed the Veterans Boulevard project and William stated that the project seems well-aligned with a number of the Administration's general priorities, especially its nonfederal leverage
- William indicated that the White House might be open to the idea of raising the Passenger Facilities Charge
 - The Administration is generally wary of the idea of raising taxes such as the federal gas tax, but they are more open to the idea of raising user fees like the PFC
- William requested more information from FresnoCOG on their upcoming EDA grant application seeking support for the transportation training facilities as well as the coordinated workforce activities in the region
- The White House noted that Ivanka Trump's workforce priorities of streamlining regulations and creating a more skilled workforce line up with those of FresnoCOG
 - William said that he will share FresnoCOG's priorities with Ivanka's team
- William reiterated that FresnoCOG should try to focus on projects seeking federal funding in opportunity zones because those projects will receive competitive priority preference for up to 60 various discretionary grant opportunities being administered by a number of different agencies including US DOT and EDA
 - Be sure to include information regarding how projects will positively benefit or serve residents and businesses within those Opportunity Zones
- William told us that "resiliency" is also a good buzzword on federal grant applications
- WH staff told us that more fire grants will be coming from the disaster recovery bill; he also mentioned that the December executive order on forest management could apply to FresnoCOG's needs
- Regarding any infrastructure proposals, William told us that a surface transportation reauthorization of the *FAST Act* is the most likely outcome moving forward as there are too many committees of jurisdiction involved with a broader infrastructure package
- Discussions between the White House and Congress on the total number and financing mechanisms are ongoing

2:30 p.m. U.S. Representative Jim Costa (D-16)

Juan Lopez, Chief of Staff

- Congressman Costa provided us with a comprehensive update of legislative developments in Congress and his recent meeting with Governor Newsroom
 - House Democrats aim to pass appropriations bills out of the House by June
 - Congressman Costa has introduced legislation regarding growing the Residency Program at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)
 - He noted the House would vote on legislation on prescription drug pricing
- On an infrastructure package, Congressman Costa told us that water infrastructure is his most important priority
 - Congressman Costa believes we need a \$2 trillion package and he recently testified at the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Members' Day hearing
 - Congressman Costa believes that the House Freedom Caucus is holding up progress by disqualifying important revenue mechanisms for the infrastructure package and that, like the rest of the world, the federal government needs to invest heavily in infrastructure
 - Even though President Trump dislikes high speed rail, Congressman Costa believes that it is still on the table
 - He believes that there is a "50% chance" Congress will pass an infrastructure package
- Rep. Costa is trying to find a bipartisan immigration reform solution
 - He supports Senator Feinstein's blue card bill
- Congressman Costa asked for a copy of the rejection letter sent by FEMA so that he can make a direct call to the agency to discuss the issue and the Central Valley Conservation Corps
- Congressman Costa asked that we send Alexa from his office more information on the Regional Fire Training Center

3:15 p.m. U.S. Representative Devin Nunes (R – CA 22)
Jilian Plank, Chief of Staff
Ian Foley, Legislative Director

- This discussion focused almost entirely on the Veterans Boulevard project
- Congressman Nunes said that he has made multiple calls to Secretary Chao and he will continue making those calls in this round
- We thanked the Congressman for his support of the City's application
- LeeAnn provided an update on the Transportation Training Facilities
- Congressman Nunes suggested that the U.S. Department of Agriculture may have some well-suited funding available for rural development
- Elisabeth provided an update on the use of TANF for improving mobility and access to jobs

- In regard to the SAFER Vehicles Rule jointly proposed by EPA and DOT, which would rollback CAFE Standards for light-duty vehicle emissions and revoke California's waiver under the Clean Air Act, Congressman Nunes believes the best case scenario is being able to buy more time before the implementation of a final rule or using litigation

4:00 p.m. U.S. Representative Tom McClintock (R – CA 04)
Chris Tudor, Chief of Staff

- Congressman McClintock was not able to attend this meeting as planned due to the House Judiciary Committee hearing involving Attorney General William Barr
- Chief of Staff Chris Tudor attended in his place and briefly reviewed some of our priorities
- We focused on the Regional Fire Training Center and Central Valley Conservation Corps
- Congressman McClintock worked to include forestry management reforms and funding in previously passed bills
 - There is frustration that these reforms are not being implemented swiftly due to bureaucracy and disconnect between federal agency headquarters in Washington and Regional Offices and state government partners located elsewhere
 - Chris offered to serve as a resource and assist with clarifying new policies and procedures whenever there is pushback encountered back in California