

3/20/2020 – Washington Policy Update

Congressional Response to the Coronavirus

Now that Congress has passed the second bill, HR 6201, Families First Coronavirus Response Act, in response to the coronavirus, and the President has signed it, the US Senate has quickly moved on to phase three. Senate Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) introduced the “Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act” or the “CARES Act.” This bill would establish a program for small business loans, provide relief for individuals and families, provide assistance to severely distressed sectors of the economy, amend the tax code to delay tax payments or suspend the collection of certain taxes, address the manufacturing and supply of medical products, expand testing for the virus and other healthcare related issues, as well as education and labor provisions linked to the impact of the coronavirus.

Although the US House of Representatives is out of Washington for a district work period, and the US Senate has stayed in session this week, the chambers continue to exchange and debate what type of economic stimulus is needed. The CARES Act is likely to cost more than \$1 trillion. The first two bills passed relatively quickly by Washington standards, but phase three may take a bit longer. The House has no intention of returning to DC until there are votes, but with several members of Congress either diagnosed with the virus or under self-quarantine, there is talk about the capability of members to cast votes from home or outside the House chamber. Further, there may be other phase three bills competing with the bill the Senate Majority Leader has introduced. House Democrats and Senate Democrats are crafting their own bills that will need to be reconciled before votes will occur, or the legislative process will slow down, which is not the scenario Congress wants to play out in front of the country.

Regarding infrastructure, Congress is hearing from all sectors about the current and future needs and impacts resulting from the slowdown of the economy. AASHTO has requested \$16.7 billion due to steep declines in user fees and tax revenues. APTA has requested \$16.0 billion in direct emergency funding for public transit agencies to offset some of the extraordinary direct costs and revenue losses. The airlines could receive up to \$58 billion in loans. Many other modes, user groups, state and local agencies, and transportation related industries are seeking relief from Congress. AMPO, NADO, and NARC have jointly drafted and sent a [letter](#) to Congress requesting several legislative provisions to assist with the impact of the coronavirus. We are also working with the USDOT to provide some administrative relief that may be needed in order to avoid non-compliance with regulations, such as public meetings or policy board meetings.

Please feel free to share our [letter](#) with members of your delegation and others, as permissible.

In addition, please send AMPO your thoughts and concerns about carrying out day-to-day planning operations that are being impacted by the changes brought on by the response to the coronavirus.

AMPO will continue to provide updates as things develop and move forward in Washington.

If you have any questions about our letter or otherwise please feel free to contact AMPO staff at any time.