

10C. LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Background

Staff has followed state and federal legislation related to transportation and Houston Galveston region. The 87th Texas Legislative session ended May 31, 2021 with the passage of two related bills (subject to approval by Governor Abbott). Federal legislation under consideration includes the American Jobs Plan and the reauthorization of the Fix American Surface Transportation Act (FAST).

Current Situation

The 87th Texas Legislature has focused on issues besides transportation. Fewer bills were filed in this session related to transportation and air quality than in the 86th Legislature. Only nine substantive bills (listed on table on the next page) even made it out of their committee; eight passed one chamber of the legislature. However, only two (highlighted in green on the table) passed both houses and made it as far as the Governor's desk and are still subject to approval.

Senate Bill 1990 sponsored by Senator Miles would allow advanced technology systems and ability of the Gulf Coast Rail District to advance high capacity transit. The web link below shows the details of the bill: <https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/87R/billtext/pdf/SB01990F.pdf#navpanes=0>. The bill is signed, would provide opportunity for the expansion or commuter, light rail and bus rapid transit services in Houston with the possibility of coordination to use available right of way of the freight rail district.

House Bill 1698 sponsored by Representative Raney would allow counties with a population exceeding 190,000 but not more than 1,500,000 to increase their registration fee by up to \$10 for transportation purposes. However, the increase would require approval in an electoral referendum. It would impact Fort Bend, Montgomery, Brazoria and Galveston Counties in our region. The web link below shows the details of the bill: <https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/87R/billtext/pdf/HB01698F.pdf#navpanes=0>

At the federal level, the American Jobs Plan future is uncertain due to a variety of issues that have been covered in depth in the media. Each political party is far apart in its prioritization and proposed amount of spending on infrastructure spending. There are varied perspectives and disagreements on definition of infrastructure and mechanisms to fund the bill. Senate rules, such as the filibuster and reconciliation, may be critical to its passage or failure. Passage of an infrastructure bill proposed would certainly have an impact on transportation funding and lead to increases in repair and maintenance of roads, bridges, airports and transit assets.

Reconciliation of the FAST Act has overshadowed discussions of the American Jobs Plan. Consideration of possible increases have been discussed by both parties, but its action is likely to be deferred to the American Jobs Plan is resolved.

Action Requested

Informational only.

Agenda Item 10C
TPC Meeting Packet - 6/25/21

Type	Bill #	Sponsor	Description	Status	Impact
Rail	Senate Bill 1990	Miles	Allowing passenger rail or bus rapid transit in Harris County aside existing rail lines	Sent to Governor	Significant for future of commuter rail in region
Safety	House Bill 442	Israel	Lowering speed limits on urban streets to 25mph	Never received vote on House Floor	Significant for local street safety
Air Quality/ Clean Vehicles	House Bill 2539	Turner	Up to \$80 million in unused Low-Income Vehicle Repair Assistance Program funding for Houston	Passed House; stalled in Senate	Balance of funding due to Houston - Galveston region
Air Quality	Senate Bill 1261	Birdwell	Exclusive jurisdiction of state to regulate greenhouse gases	Passed Senate stalled in House	Precludes any county or city entity in region from regulating greenhouse gas emissions
Air Quality	Senate Bill 1263	Birdwell	Increased Funding for Texas Emissions Reduction Plan	Passed Senate; stalled in House	Increased grants for Texas Emissions Reduction Plan and program
Transportation Revenue Bills	Senate Bill 1728	Schwerner	Equalization of funding for electric vehicles	Passed Senate; stalled in House	Would have increased cost of electric vehicles and transportation revenues
Transportation Revenue Bills	House Bill 1698	Raney	Optional up to \$20 Registration Fee for Transportation funding for counties	Sent to Governor	Would allow county with population of over 190,000 - 1.5 million to pass increase in registration via referendum
MPO Related	House Bill 2683	Canales	Rules governing open meetings broadcast over the internet	Passed by House; stalled in Senate	Will codify remote meetings as a result of pandemic
Transit	House Bill 1294	Guillen	Exemption of rural transit districts from motor fuel tax for gas only	Approved by House; stalled in Senate	Rural transit agencies - limited