



Committee Update

Notes From Conference Call with Steven Carlson Legislative Director to Representative Chris Pappas (D-NH-1)

Hello NEC Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Members – I would like to thank everyone who participated in our conference call on Tuesday with Mr. Steven Carlson, Legislative Director for Representative Chris Pappas (D-NH). For those of you who were not able to join us, the following is a write-up of that portion of the call with Mr. Carlson. Further Committee info will be forthcoming.

As many members know, Steven Carlson is new to New Hampshire's first district – as is Representative Pappas – however many Council members remember him from his years of service in the office of former Congressman Mike Capuano.

Steven started out with a slight history of the past few highway bills – 2015's FAST Act; 2012's MAP-21; and 2005's SAFETEA-LU – along with several stop-gap measures that passed when the authorizations ran out on the aforementioned bills. He noted that the one ongoing concern was how to pay for the projects authorized by these bills as the primary funding source – the federal gas tax – has not been raised since 1993 leading to a funding shortfall of \$140 billion per year.

Mr. Carlson went on to say that President Trump declared infrastructure a priority, but in legislation he proposed last year, flipped the traditional "80-20" ratio of federal to state & local funds so a \$1 trillion proposal would have only \$200 billion in federal dollars. This approach did not take hold in Congress in 2018.

He said that the bipartisan demand still exists for addressing infrastructure in 2019, noting that it would have to be the White House pushing Congress to act. However, he implied, the politics of 2020 races may make it increasingly difficult to pass a bill [unless it happens this year]. Mr. Carlson noted that Congressman Pappas will look to ensure that N.H. and New England are "fairly" funded in whatever bill appears before Congress.

He also mentioned that on other fronts, Mr. Pappas will look to support expansion of service in and out of Manchester-Boston airport, as well as connecting N.H. with commuter rail service. He also brought up the regulation of PFAS chemicals, which is a growing health and environmental concern.

Steven then took the opportunity to field questions from Council members, including a request to find out what the likelihood would be for new revenues being raised to sustain the current infrastructure system and address future needs/issues like autonomous vehicles. Steven said that there is bipartisan support for paying for the system that we need, but a recognition that we have to change how we fund these items long-term. He added that gas tax increases will not work as a long-term solution and that other viable funding options will need to emerge.

Steven addressed a question on congestion in the region by stating that the solution lies in a comprehensive plan to address land use, living and working patterns, and various transportation changes, but noted that in all likelihood, congestion will get worse before it gets better.

Several questions revolved around mass transit, rail, and bus service to which Steven indicated that states have not taken full advantage of flexibility of funding for transit use, while also stating that Democrats in the Northeast will continue to fight for funding Amtrak in the region. He added that for many areas of the country, buses are the only “mass transit” option, and therefore will likely gain fair treatment in a final infrastructure bill. He also said that there will need to be a decision made as to whether or not to “overload” a bill with all sorts of infrastructure requests and perhaps sink its chances, or try and not be overly ambitious and focus on what may be “doable.” There is a “sweet-spot” and the trick will be to find it.