



PSTA 2016 Federal Legislative Agenda

1. Support funding for Small Starts Projects under the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Capital Investment Grant program

Discretionary funding is included in the annual federal Transportation Appropriations Bill for Small Starts Projects. Grants under this program are for capital costs associated with new fixed guide way systems, extensions, and bus corridor improvements, such as bus rapid transit (BRT) routes. Consistent with President Obama's proposed FY 2016 budget request, the final Fiscal Year 2016 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, which was signed into law last month, included \$353,000,000 to fully fund all nine of the Small Starts projects as proposed by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The President will not release his Fiscal Year 2017 budget request, and small starts funding recommendations, until early February. If, as he has done in the past, the President recommends funding for all eligible small starts projects as proposed by FTA, this will help PSTA and the Central Avenue BRT Project as it will clear out all currently eligible projects to make room for new Fiscal Year 2018 projects, the first year PSTA could be eligible for project funding. The PSTA legislative team will work to support the highest level of funding possible for small starts projects. This will include working directly with the House and Senate Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee leadership, members and staff. Pinellas County Congressman David Jolly is a member of the subcommittee and PSTA Board Members Rice and Long and CEO Miller met with Congressman Jolly and his Chairman, Florida Congressman Mario Diaz Balart on this issue last October.

2. Support funding for the federal TIGER grant program

The purpose of the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant program is to make transformative surface transportation investments by focusing on capital projects that generate economic development and improve access to reliable, safe and affordable transportation and that improve connections to employment, education, services and other opportunities, workforce development, or community revitalization. The final Fiscal Year 2016 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, which was signed into law last month, included \$500 million for the TIGER grant program. President Obama will not submit his Fiscal Year 2017 budget to Congress until February, but he has always included a robust request for TIGER grant funding and the PSTA legislative team will encourage the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to support the President's request. As with small starts funding, this will require working directly with the House and Senate Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee

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PSTA and HART submitted a joint TIGER grant application last year to utilize smart card technology to create a joint fare box that would allow PSTA and HART riders to use the same fare cards. The project, which was not selected for funding last year, would have extended smart card technology to riders from other neighboring transit authorities. This was one of 625 applications for TIGER grant funding last year, of which only 39 were selected for funding.

3. Monitor Implementation of the FAST Act

Late in 2015 Congress approved a five year surface transportation bill, called “Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, authorizing funds and providing policy direction to the Department of Transportation on transit and other transportation issues. Implementation of the new law will take place over the coming months and years. The PSTA legislative team will monitor and advise the Board of initiatives that would affect PSTA and its operations and will develop proposed responses to DOT and FTA as issues arise.

2016 PSTA Federal Affairs Strategy and Timeline

January 6, 2016 – Harry Glenn and Steve Palmer meet with the PSTA Legislative Committee to discuss 2015 legislative activity and to begin development of a 2016 federal legislative plan and schedule.

February 2016 – President Obama submits his Fiscal Year 2017 budget request to Congress. This usually occurs during the first week of the month and kicks off the Congressional appropriations cycle. House and Senate leadership have indicated a desire to complete as much appropriations work as possible prior to the beginning of the new fiscal year on October 1, 2016. Because of the truncated legislative session this year, the appropriations process is expected to begin as much as six weeks earlier than normal.

February/March 2016 – With completion of a five year transportation bill by Congress last year, the primary focus of attention for transit agencies in 2016 will be on the Fiscal Year 2017 appropriations process. If the board plans another Washington trip this year, VSA would recommend scheduling it for late February or early March. This would allow Board members to share their support of funding for key transit accounts and to update the Congressional delegation on the status of the Central Avenue BRT small start application. Note that the annual Washington APTA conference is in March. VSA would recommend not scheduling the Board visit to Washington at the same time, if possible.

February/March 2016 – VSA, on behalf of PSTA, will help generate letters from the Tampa Bay area Congressional Delegation to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, requesting full funding of the FTA Capital Investment Grants program in the FY 2017 bills, with an emphasis on full funding of the proposed Small Starts projects.

Spring 2016 – PSTA will begin the application process for its Small Starts project to enter Project Development, which is the first phase of the FTA Small Starts evaluation process for funding the Central Avenue BRT route. The initial application is filed with the FTA Region 4 office in Atlanta. It is important that PSTA initiate this process as soon as possible with the hope that the application process could be completed in time for FTA to include the BRT project in its budget request for Fiscal Year 2018, which goes to Congress in February 2017, and which provides funding for the fiscal year beginning on October 1, 2017.

Late Spring 2016 – Following submission of the BRT application to FTA, the VSA team will work with PSTA to begin securing letters of support for the project from the St. Petersburg and Pinellas County community, including businesses and other supportive stakeholders. The letters will be sent to the Congressional Delegation and FTA. VSA and PSTA will use these letters to encourage the members of the Congressional Delegation to send letters of support to DOT and FTA urging project approval.

March-July 2016 – VSA will monitor Congressional committee markups of the FY 2017 Transportation Appropriations bills and provide timely updates to the PSTA board and staff. If necessary, VSA will secure calls from the Tampa Bay area Congressional Delegation to the Chairmen of the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittee seeking full funding of the proposed FTA Small Starts budget and the listing of the Central Avenue BRT project in their respective appropriations bills.

The VSA team will provide the PSTA Board and staff with regular updates about the progress of the Transportation Appropriations bills, and other transportation-related legislation and regulations that may be of interest. The VSA team also is available to attend your Legislative Committee and Board meetings when your Board members and staff think it would be helpful.

Finally, your VSA team will work with the PSTA Board and staff to continue to find ways in which PSTA can partner with HART, the Florida Transit Association, the American Public Transportation Association, the Bus Coalition, and other national, state, and local organizations in sharing a unified message with senior Congressional leaders and the Florida Delegation on key appropriations and legislative measures. We also are available to engage with national transit associations when appropriate.