

FHWA RETIREES NEWSLETTER

5TH EDITION

NOVEMBER 2021

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Greetings!

This issue brings great news about our next reunion and cautious optimism regarding future highway legislation. In retirement things normally slow down. This year, in some respects, time is flying by. Early in the year, we celebrated our vaccinations due to age and

vulnerability priority. Next we celebrated our children getting vaccinated as enough vaccine became available for them. Now we celebrate our grandchildren getting vaccinated after testing was completed and dosage protocols were approved. Wow, what a year!

Report by Lyle Renz, Board Chair

I am happy to report that after a two-year period of Covid-19 induced uncertainty we have a signed contract for our next reunion as described below. In addition, this issue is designed to provide an informed and incisive legislative outlook by Susan Binder, a retiree who is deeply involved in the process and has volunteered her insights, an update on our very successful and continually improving website, a second "Out of the Attic" excerpt, and our usual "retiree humor" compilation.

You were recently sent a copy of the text submitted to FHWA News regarding our next reunion. Things are happening so fast that the FHWA News publication deadline got ahead of our work on this issue. It's all good news.

The FHWA News article is reproduced below.

I want to close by saying I plan to be in Kentucky for our reunion and hope to see you there.

Stay Safe
Lyle Renz

The FHWA News Article

Retirees Planning a Comeback

Hold the Dates for Our Next Reunion

Tuesday, May 17 to Saturday, May 21, 2022

Griffin Gate Marriott Resort & Spa
Lexington, Kentucky

Little did the Executive Board of the FHWA Retirees know that after many years of very successful reunions, the last of which was in Chicago/Schaumburg, Illinois in 2019, a disaster was looming.

Since the fall of 2021 retirees, the senior members of the FHWA family, have been impacted greatly by Covid-19. We remain, however, very optimistic and are now the most vaccinated generation looking forward to getting back to the travel and linkages with family and friends that we relish and thrive on.

The Board was challenged with decisions about cancelling--not one but two--reunions. Each decision had possible cost ramifications. The Board worked with the leadership teams in Idaho and Kentucky to make the tough decision to cancel the 2020 reunion in Boise, Idaho for which there was a signed contract. Because reunions are planned several years in advance a contract had also been signed for a 2021 reunion in Kentucky. That reunion also had to be canceled.

With that behind us, we are back on course and are enthusiastically looking to the future. Evan Wisniewski, the lead on the Kentucky reunion, took up the challenge of reestablishing the reunion calendar. He negotiated a new favorable contract with the Marriot Hotel and the Board unanimously approved it.

An outstanding program is planned in a hotel with many amenities, including our usual hospitality suite, golf, and tours of the unique Kentucky locale. Reunion packages will be sent to retirees early in the new year. Current FHWA employees considering retirement are welcome and encouraged to join us in Kentucky and in annual reunions in different parts of the country in the years ahead.

As always check out the FHWA retirees web site <https://www.fhwa-retirees.org> for more complete information on the organization and its activities.

Report by Al Steger Website and Email Coordinator

Now that the FHWA Retirees organization is back on track with holding annual reunions, it is the perfect time to reconnect with those you may have lost track of over the years. And the **FHWA Retirees** website <https://www.fhwa-retirees.org/> is the perfect tool to do just that. If you are new to the ranks of the retired, or perhaps only contemplating retirement in the next year or so, you can also use the website to explore past reunions to see what they are about. There are photos posted of all past reunions and minutes of the short business meetings that are a part of each reunion. But you will need to register on the website to access the member only areas. Simply click the login icon on the website and follow the instructions.

The **Member Area** of the website will provide you with the FHWA Retirees contact list so you can easily find emails, phone numbers and mailing addresses of our members. Furthermore, the **Forum** that you will find in the **Member Area** will allow you to share information with other

members similar to the way you might use social media. You can post, like, comment, follow close friends, etc., just as you might do on Facebook. Maybe it's news about family members, vacations, hobbies, etc. Or perhaps it's reminiscences about old times at FHWA or the BPR, or simply a brief update about your current situation. You can even post photos or a short video. Why not share those things by posting them to the FHWA Retirees **Forum**? The **Forum** was created for just that purpose.

Concerned about privacy? No problem. All posts will be protected behind the firewall and accessible only to FHWA retirees.

The time is right for making your plans for the 2022 reunion in Lexington. So, get in touch with old friends to see if they are going, or better yet, encourage them to go so you can get reacquainted. And, as always, if you have comments on how we can make the website more valuable to you, please reach out to us at fhwaretires@gmail.com.

Retiree Leadership

The current board members are: Lyle Renz, chair; Dale Wilken, past chair; George Ostensen, who presides at the business meeting; Phil Miller, treasurer; Joyce Curtis; Kevin Heanue; Steve

Moreno; Gary White, and Rita Steinke. In addition, Al Steger does the layout/formatting of this Newsletter and is the mailing and website coordinator.

Legislation Report by Susan Binder

Note: While the newsletter was being processed, Congress passed an infrastructure bill that is about to be signed by the President. Rather than holding up the Newsletter and the article as written by Susan several weeks ago, we are publishing it. Her article contains much information on the legislative process that remains useful. At the same time, we pledge to follow up in a few weeks with an update on the contents of the just-passed bill and any available implementation information.

Susan Binder covered FHWA reauthorizations throughout her long career with FHWA, culminating as Deputy Associate Administrator for Policy and Governmental Affairs. She also brought her experience as Division Administrator for Maryland to her role leading FHWA policy and legislation development including a period on staff of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, culminating with passage of MAP-21. She now is a Principal with Cambridge Systematics and retains close ties to Congressional committee actions and her FHWA colleagues.

We've all seen during our careers the short-term uncertainty for surface reauthorizations. Extensions have been many over the years. Eventually, the wide support for these programs of state aid have assured that passage comes through, although it has sometimes been tense for those of us writing the language over and over and preparing to implement. The nature of the business model established in the 1950s meant that we could take advantage of the contract authority that was protected by the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) and thus FHWA staff were usually able to keep working throughout. Reauthorizations and their implementation could be a struggle, but those challenges seem quaint in comparison to the divisiveness we now see in Congress and across the nation.

This cycle feels so very different! Many more moving parts and players. So much grandstanding on all sides. Since the coverage of negotiations is rarely on the details of the provisions but instead on the drama of its scope and the "top-line" money, it is hard to know what is actually being considered.

The "good news" is that transportation as infrastructure has elevated visibility. Remember when we tried to get a mention in the State of the Union and were thrilled for any oblique reference? Now infrastructure is a common buzzword but frankly, became somewhat of a joke because it was a priority that still didn't get traction. And personally, I found it ironic that even though roads and bridges were trotted out (again) as evidence of common ground and valuable public goods, when it came to looking at the actual funding levels, other forms of infrastructure seem to dominate. Considering the immense scale of these bills, detailed program designs are not typically spelled out for transportation or for other forms of infrastructure, in either the bills themselves or the summaries. Aspirational arguments seem to be sufficient. This leaves tremendous responsibility and latitude to our former colleagues in the executive branch, which may or may not be feasible or good policy.

The issues behind the curtain are

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perennial and predictable:

- Will the poor health of the Federal HTF finally be addressed or just kicked down the road with transfers from the General Fund? (Although two of the bills contain studies and pilots of Vehicle Miles of Travel fees, Congress seems no longer committed to the user fee principle and my guess is the answer will again be the latter.)
- Will program structures fed by formulas be reformed to favor targeted priorities and bring greater accountability for performance, or will they be broadened even further into highly flexible block grants? (My read is that as negotiations drag on and more specific interests need to be satisfied, a smaller proportion of the total will be formula but the overall size will bring significant increases of both types of assistance. States continue to argue for the benefits of formula programs but they are under attack by those who challenge state priorities.)
- Will progressive goals be reflected in new programs, or will they be imbedded into more requirements at the programming and project levels for continuing programs? (Probably both, with great significance for program delivery. The Administration clearly aims to apply significant influence, whether such features are built into the law or not.)
- Will earmarks make their return or will huge numbers of discretionary programs blossom, making “one-off” projects a challenge for oversight and implementation? (Among all the bills making their way through, the answer is both. The workload and vulnerabilities associated with such conditions do not seem to be appreciated by the Department or Congressional interests.)

Here is the current status. It is certainly not “regular order” as they say, but some interim milestones have been accomplished. Three bills are in play that could serve as “reauthorizations”: the Senate Environmental and Public Works Committee’s, the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure’s, the bipartisan infrastructure bill (BIF), and whatever is relevant within a Reconciliation/Build Back Better bill. And that doesn’t include the authorizing language that is creeping into appropriations. It will be quite a chore to resolve conflicting provisions that are sure to survive.

As of this week (October 25), hope springs eternal as intense negotiations are taking place among the Democrats who need unanimity in order to pass a combination of these bills. Ostensibly, the social infrastructure bill will be passed as part of a reconciliation package. The President had committed not to “double dip,” meaning he would not endorse provisions in a reconciliation vehicle that changed funding agreed to under the BIF.

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However, there have been transport-related provisions seen in various drafts of reconciliation that would themselves need to be reconciled.

- The Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST) was essentially extended by one year as part of COVID legislation. And then another month to the end of October after a one-day lapse. (The continuing resolution for the rest of the Federal Government wasn't enough to compensate for lack of a reauthorization bill.) The Administration made a convenient interpretation that they could make reimbursement payments even with the temporary lapse in authorization.
 - The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee had passed their bill out of committee in 2019, one that moderates were willing to build upon, but many progressives felt did not go far enough. S. 2301, America's Transportation Innovation Act, passed \$287B for highways over five years, thru FY25.
 - However, considering that the other committees of jurisdiction had not passed portions for transit and finance, for example, a whole new set of players have since weighed in. Senate moderates beyond the authorizing committees looking for workable compromise, with White House support, took the
- lead, much to the dismay of the House who felt they were robbed of a chance to conference their bill.
- The so-called bipartisan infrastructure bill (BIF) passed the Senate Aug 11, 2021, focusing on relatively traditional infrastructure including transportation with both Republican and Democratic support, totaling \$944B. For highways, the Federal Highway Aid Program (FHWA) would be reauthorized through 2026, with \$52.5B in FY 2022, increasing two percent every year and reaching \$56.8B in FY 2026. There is a mix of title 23 and other portions of the Federal Code. It is unclear whether these will be assigned to FHWA or other portions of USDOT due to the multi-modal nature of many of them.
 - The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee majority had pushed through their freestanding bill on a party line basis on June 29, 2020 and even then, with resistance from some Democrats. House T&I passed on a five-year proposal through 2025 of \$494B "INVEST in America Act" that would have contained a 62 percent increase over the FAST Act. It had adopted major reforms supported by progressives, with significant increases in program levels. The House incorporated this into their larger "Moving

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America Forward Act” on July 1, totaling \$1.5 trillion authorizations included:

- Highways \$319B (\$257B is contract authority), amounting to a 27 percent increase
 - Transit \$105B (\$77.7 formula), amounting to a 54 percent increase
 - Rail \$60B, amounting to a 32 percent increase in passenger rail
 - Highway Safety \$10B
- Tensions in the House over voting on the BIF continue to delay action. While moderates wanted to vote on it, progressives did not want to give up their bargaining chip, instead insisting on coupling it with the much larger social infrastructure bill that was not written yet. Pressure has been building to complete the dual package, but the President seems to put aside the need to pass the BIF quickly in favor of rolling together both pieces, and supporting the progressives. Interest groups such as the US Chamber of Commerce and AASHTO have been promoting passage of the BIF ASAP.

Now for some pieces from the BIF bill you might find interesting. It is obvious that the manner in which these proposals took shape has led to some duplication and inconsistencies across both new and old programs, within and outside USDOT. It remains confusing and until it is determined what is

actually voted upon, these must be interpreted as a “work-in-progress:”

- **Resiliency:** A new provision is included which would explicitly require consideration of sea level rise, the increasing number of natural disasters, and extreme weather events, when planning transportation infrastructure; expands eligibility of planning funds. **Adds eligibilities for electric vehicle (EV) charging and other technologies to Surface Transportation Block Grant Program** authorized at \$72B. Another program, **Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient and Cost-saving Transportation (PROTECT) Grant Program** has \$7.3B formula and \$1.4B in competitive grants (over five years) for resilience improvements at the state and municipal levels.
- A new **Congestion Relief Program** would contain \$250M in competitive grants at 80 percent Federal share of at least \$10M each to states, local governments and MPOs for projects in large urbanized areas of more than 1M. Expands eligibility of Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Control (CMAQ) at \$13.2B for micro mobility, zero emission vehicles, and charging equipment. **Increases transportation alternatives program** to \$7.2B. Creates a

Formula Carbon reduction program of \$6.42B to reduce transportation carbon emissions. Eligible projects include truck stop electrification systems, trail facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists, congestion management technologies, EV charging infrastructure, and port electrification and would require states to develop a carbon reduction strategy.

- A **“Safe Streets and Roads for All”** Grant Program is established at \$1B to develop and carry out comprehensive safety plans to prevent death and injury on roads and streets. The **Highway Safety Improvement Program** is funded at \$15.575B, adding eligibility for grade separation projects, traffic calming features, traffic control devices for pedestrians and bicyclists and requiring state highway safety plans every three years. Another program dubbed **“Healthy Streets”** would provide \$500M in competitive grants to deploy cool pavements and porous pavements and to expand tree cover. Another program **“Stopping Threats on Pedestrians”** establishes a \$25M competitive grant program to install bollard projects to prevent pedestrian injuries and acts of terrorism.
- **Bridges:** A **Bridge Replacement, Rehabilitation, Preservation, Protection and Construction Formula Program** is funded at \$27.5B

with 100 percent Federal share. A **new competitive discretionary Bridge Grant Program** is funded at \$3.265B.

- **Public transportation** eligibilities under title 23 are expanded to include construction of Bus Rail Train (BRT) corridors or dedicated bus lanes.
- **Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects** are appropriated raising the cap for the program previously known as INFRA for multimodal (rail/port) projects from 10 to 30 percent. An additional appropriation of \$3.2B brings the total to \$8B from FY 2022 to FY 2026.
- A new, competitive **“Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program”** at \$500M will study the feasibility and impacts of removing, retrofitting or mitigating existing transportation facilities that create barriers to mobility, access or economic development and potentially construct projects to remove, retrofit, replace or mitigate an eligible facility.
- **Rail programs** are authorized at \$78B over five years including:
 - Amtrak National Network: \$12.65B
 - Amtrak Northeast Corridor Grants: \$6.57B
 - Federal-State Partnership Intercity Passenger Rail: \$7.5B
 - Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

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RETIREE HUMOR - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

- Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (CRISI): \$5B
- FRA Restoration and Enhancement Grants: \$250M
- A number of programs with separate authorizations would be created to build out a network of EVs, establish a grant program for Alternative Fuel Corridors, and provide additional formula funding for purposes of

implementing state plans. A Joint Office of Energy and Transportation is established but it is not clear how these programs are interrelated. Further, appropriations are made at \$1B/year to fund a Clean School Bus Program and \$50M/year for a new Electric or Low-Emitting Ferry Pilot Program.

Hang on to your hats!!

Improving FHWA Retiree Outreach

In future issues we hope to include short summaries of interesting or unusual things retirees are doing and photos. We welcome submissions and other suggestions. Let us hear from you.

To get started we welcome your suggestions about how to share a broader range of retiree experiences in

future editions of this newsletter. Send an email to Kevin Heanue (kheanue@comcast.net), and/or Lyle Renz (renzv1@comcast.net) with items that might be included in the Newsletter or for items to be posted on the website, to Al Steger (alan.steger@gmail.com).

Retiree Humor

A Federal Highway Texas Division retiree on his 1980s retirement informed his colleagues that he was going to buy a rocker for his front porch and enjoy sitting in it and after six months was going to start rocking.

In contrast, a Washington office retiree during the same time frame when asked on his last day which was a Friday, what he was going to do in retirement said, “my wife wants me to start painting the kitchen on Monday.”

The above two items are true. Do not know whether the geography or the organizational level have anything to do with the different retirement outlooks.

The biggest lie you tell yourself is, “I don’t need to write it down; I will remember it.”

When COVID-19 is over, the first meeting I will attend is either Weight

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Watchers or Alcoholics Anonymous.

When you retire you switch bosses from the one who hired you to the one you married.

At my age my back goes out more than I do.

To share with your grandchildren:

- What do you call an alligator in a vest? An investigator.
- What do you call a sleeping bull? A bulldozer.

Out of the Attic

We are again pleased to provide, with a shout out to Rita Steinke, our board member and unofficial historian, who recommended doing it, a second sample of excerpts, edited for length, from “On the Road Again” a compilation by Janet Morehead of reminiscences by BPR trainees and their spouses while in the then three-year training program.

In the preface of the publication, published in 1992, thanks are given to Judy Nemmers, Bari Morehead and Virginia Renz for working on it.

THE WORST PLACE

The worst place we ever were was Kayenta in the Four Corners region of Arizona. To get there, the last 30 miles were red dirt. Kayenta was designated the most remote post office in the United States and the town furthest from any railroad. There was no TV or radio reception. To find out standings of the ball teams we would load the kids into the station wagon on a clear night and drive to the top of the nearest mesa to see if we could get reception on the car radio.

Janet Morehead (Barry)

SPRING

In the first 15 years with the Federal Highway Administration (Bureau of Public Roads) I lived in 43 places. In 1954, we saw spring arrive three times. In February, we were in Las Cruces New Mexico when the leaves came out. Six weeks later we were in New Meadows, Idaho when it turned spring and the leaves came out. Six weeks later we were in Glendive, Montana when the leaves sprouted.

William Peterson

TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT?

It was the summer of 1969 --on a construction assignment in the northern woods of Idaho near the tiny resort community of Lowell, with numerous mountain goats, deer, elk, a few bear, eagles and other creatures. It was awesome! We found a trailer that was neat, clean and contained all the necessities of home – -all 20 feet of it. The bathroom was so small that to use the toilet, it was easier to take your pants down before you backed in and slid shut the door.

But probably the biggest challenge of

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all was sleeping. The bed was a mere 36 inches wide. Rita and I had to sleep on our sides and perfected the art of

snuggling. As you can imagine, the situation provided for a romantic summer.

Donald Steinke

Please keep your contact information current

If you have moved and changed address or have a new email address or if you received this newsletter from a friend and want to get on the email list please let us know. Send an email to fhwaretires@gmail.com with the following information: name, spouse's name (if applicable), street address, telephone number and email address.

If you are so inclined, send a copy of this newsletter to a fellow retiree who is not on our mailing list and suggest that they sign up.

To receive **FHWA News** or make a change in your contact information, please provide your name and street address to [Gregg Miller@dot.gov](mailto:Gregg.Miller@dot.gov).

We hope you all enjoy a happy holiday season with a return to former traditions and that you plan to be with us in Kentucky!

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