



International Right of Way Association Weekly Update

Monday, January 14, 2019

Trump Administration

- The President continues to focus on the government funding lapse and his push to find \$5.7 billion to fund a wall on the Nation's southern border. He delivered a prime-time address from the Oval Office last week making his case for the wall. He is also weighing other ways of funding the wall that do not rely on congressional appropriations, such as an emergency declaration that would then divert existing federal government resources to the border wall. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/11/politics/republicans-divided-trump-national-emergency/index.html>
- The White House is making plans in the event that the shutdown lasts through the end of February. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/white-house-contemplates-weeks-more-of-shutdown-11547235701>
- The U.S. Department of Transportation ("USDOT") saw some changes in its senior staff this week. Chief of Staff Geoff Burr is leaving, as are senior advisor Jim Ray and Deputy Assistant Secretary Grover Burtthey.

Congress

- Both Chambers are in session this week, but a resolution to the shutdown does not appear imminent. The House has passed bills to restore funding, but Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell will not waste Senate Floor-time on legislation he knows the President will veto.

Analysis

- The government funding lapse is now the longest shutdown in U.S. history, with both sides just as dug-in as on day one.
- The impact is also beginning to be felt in a major way for state departments of transportation. The Federal Highway Administration is funded using a special type of federal budget authority that enables the Administration to continue functioning despite the funding lapse for USDOT. However, only about a quarter of the highway funds each state is slated to receive this year are available, and no new projects are being approved. <https://aashtojournal.org/2019/01/11/federal-shutdown-impacting-project-planning-for-state-dots/>

- Transit agencies and the Federal Transit Administration, which is largely funded through general appropriations, are in even worse shape.
- While the infrastructure committees in Congress continue to organize and finalize staff, subcommittees, and membership, it is difficult to see the work that these committees want to do actually coming to fruition absent a resolution to the shutdown and a general reset of relationships between Congress and the White House.