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House Passes HR 4348, Setting Up Chance for Senate Conference on Long-term Bill

Hopes that Congress might pass a new surface transportation bill this year were buoyed this week as the House of Representatives returned to work following a two-week recess and immediately passed an additional 90-day extension of the current authorization, setting up the potential for a conference with the Senate.

HR 4348, which passed Wednesday by a vote of 293 to 127, now goes to the Senate where leaders were expected to amend the bill to include the text of MAP-21, the two-year \$109 billion transportation bill the Senate passed last month. Ultimately, both houses would appoint conferees to negotiate the final details of HR 4348 in conference committee.

The House and Senate on March 30 approved HR 4281, a clean 90-day extension of the current surface transportation authorization, known as SAFETEA-LU, through June 30, 2012. It was the 9th extension of the current authorization.

"It has always been AASHTO's goal to seek a well funded, long-term transportation bill, which includes essential policy reforms," said AASHTO Executive Director John Horsley. "However, the top priority is to ensure stability in the Federal-aid Highway and Transit programs for the immediate future. We support moving swiftly to conference and the enactment of a bill mutually agreed to by the House and Senate."

The House bill included provisions that would accelerate approval of the Keystone XL Pipeline, as well as some environmental streamlining provisions and other bill language that were part of HR 7, the proposed five-year transportation bill that failed to gain traction in the House earlier this year.

House Transportation and Infrastructure committee Chairman John Mica, R-Florida, said in a statement, "This legislation will help move the process forward in working to resolve differences with the Senate."

"This legislation will allow programs to continue through the fiscal year and provide predictability during the summer construction season," Chairman of the Highways and Transit Subcommittee John J. Duncan, Jr., R-Tennessee, said in a statement.

Questions regarding this article may be directed to editor@ashtojournal.org.