

From: [Valaitis, Ada](#)
To: [Soskin, Eric](#)
Cc: [Behm, Mitchell](#); [Richmond, Nathan](#); [Nossaman, Andrea](#)
Subject: RE: Clips for Monday, February 27, 2023
Date: Monday, February 27, 2023 12:57:38 PM
Attachments: image004.png

Thanks, Eric, will do.

From: Soskin, Eric <Eric.Soskin.IG@oig.dot.gov>
Sent: Monday, February 27, 2023 11:52 AM
To: Valaitis, Ada <Ada.Valaitis@oig.dot.gov>
Cc: Behm, Mitchell <Mitchell.Behm@oig.dot.gov>; Richmond, Nathan <Nathan.Richmond@oig.dot.gov>; Nossaman, Andrea <Andrea.Nossaman@oig.dot.gov>
Subject: RE: Clips for Monday, February 27, 2023
Importance: Low

Ada / Eric,

I noticed this article from Friday, which mentions OIG's JS position listings, didn't make it into today's clips (and I don't think it was in Friday's either). Please include tomorrow.

Thanks,
Eric

<https://www.foxnews.com/politics/federal-government-internships-paying-50k-60k-even-more-student-trainees>



Federal government internships paying \$50K, \$60K, even more for 'student trainees'

By Peter Kasperowicz

Published February 24, 2023
Fox News

STUDENT TRAINEE (PDR - FOLIO MONTRO)

**Development Finance Corporation (formerly Overseas Private
Investment Corporation)**

Other Agencies and Independent Organizations

Washington, District of Columbia

Office of Financial and Portfolio Management

1000 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002

Student Nurse Technician

Veterans Health Administration

Department of Veterans Affairs

Los Angeles, California

Respiratory Medicine Center

11661 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1000
Los Angeles, California 90025

1000 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
1000 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002

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Washington, D.C. 20002



Video

The federal government is advertising a slew of top-tier internships at several agencies that pay as much as \$50,000 or \$60,000 a year or even more – matching and in some cases exceeding the U.S. median income for adults.

The government this week was advertising a handful of internships that pay nothing and many that pay \$16-\$18 an hour. But many others list the pay as an annual salary, and the top-tier internships listed on the government's Intern.USAJobs.gov website site offer more than \$60,000 per year if students can work a combination of part- and full-time schedules during the year.

Those salaries are above the median U.S. income of about \$54,000 as measured by the government in late 2022.

Several of these internships are listed as part of the government's "Pathway Program," which looks to entice top students for careers in the federal government.

DEMS PROPOSE 'BABY BONDS' TO CLOSE THE RACIAL WEALTH GAP: 'BLACK LIVES AND BLACK WEALTH MATTER'



President Biden has presided over some of the highest-spending years ever seen in the federal government, and his administration is offering some internships that pay more than the median U.S. salary last year. (Oliver

Contreras / Getty Images / File)

One internship is for an IT student trainee at the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. in San Francisco, which pays a salary that is "starting at \$66,333 per year" and as high as \$131,367 per year, but the listing does not explain how a salary within that range is decided. It says the student who is selected "will be offered an indefinite appointment in the excepted service" and must be able to work "year round" in the San Francisco office. It asks for full-time work during the summer and 20 hours per week during the school year and breaks.

The Development Finance Corp. in Washington, D.C., is looking for a "student trainee" who will earn a salary that starts at \$64,957 per year and may reach as high as \$84,441 per year, in a "portfolio monitoring" internship that lasts as long as 12 months. This position is also looking to take on a student who may be converted to a career appointment at the agency.

A student nurse technician internship at the Department of Veterans Affairs in Fresno, California, is offering \$63,758 per year for a position that last no longer than 12 months and indicates a need for 9.5 hours shifts. A student who wants to be a "visual communication specialist" at the Department of Transportation's Office of Inspector General in the nation's capital can make \$53,105 in a year at this "full-time paid internship" that lasts one year.

THE INCREDIBLE CONGRESSIONAL SPENDING SPREE OF 2022

STUDENT TRAINEE-PORTFOLIO MONITRIG

Development Finance Corporation (formerly Overseas Private Investment Corporation)

1100 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.
Washington, District of Columbia
Office of Financial and Portfolio Management

https://www.dfc.gov/employment/development-finance-corporation/development-finance-corporation-student-trainee-portfolio-monitoring

https://www.dfc.gov/employment/development-finance-corporation/development-finance-corporation-student-trainee-portfolio-monitoring

Student Nurse Technician

Veterans Health Administration

Department of Veterans Affairs
Fresno, California
Fresno VA Medical Center

https://www.va.gov/employment/employment-opportunities/employment-opportunities-student-nurse-technician

https://www.va.gov/employment/employment-opportunities/employment-opportunities-student-nurse-technician

Top-tier federal internships posted on USAJobs.gov in February 2023 were paying \$50,000, \$60,000 and even more. (Fox News Digital/screenshot)

And a writer-editor in that same office at the Department of Transportation can also earn \$53,105 in a year as an intern, although this is listed a "full-time paid summer internship," indicating that the salary attached to this post will be pro-rated to reflect that the job only lasts part of the year. However, this post also says after the internship expires, the student "may be converted to a permanent or TERM appointment," and says "extensions to this appointment may occur."

The Office of Personnel Management did not reply to questions from Fox News Digital about how internship salaries are set.

One budget expert said the government is likely offering high salaries to interns partly to overcome the lengthy and complicated process of getting a job in the government.

"Such high pay for short-term interns almost certainly reflects the burdensome nature of the federal hiring process as well as the impact of inflation and worker shortages on the overall labor market," said Rachel Greszler, a research fellow on budgets and entitlements at the Heritage Foundation. "The federal government's lengthy and bureaucratic process puts it at a competitive disadvantage against private employers who can place candidates into positions within weeks instead of months."

BIDEN'S DEFICIT REDUCTION BRAG MASKS COLOSSAL WAVE OF NEW SPENDING



House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., has insisted on spending cuts as a condition for raising the debt ceiling. (Tom Williams / CQ-Roll Call Inc. via Getty Images / File)

She said the high wages also reflect the overall inflationary environment caused by both COVID and the federal government's response to the pandemic, which involved record levels of inflationary spending.

"Since the COVID-19 pandemic, employers have struggled to find workers, and the federal government is no exception," she said. "That's caused employers to have to raise wages and provide signing bonuses and other incentives to attract workers."

Veronique de Rugy, a senior research fellow at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, said the government's elevated intern pay also reflects the simple fact that federal officials are used to spending whatever they like.

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"You can never expect money will be spent wisely when they're not spending their own money," she said. "The government is going to not care about spending money wisely."

Pete Kasperowicz is a politics editor at Fox News Digital.

From: Valaitis, Ada <Ada.Valaitis@oig.dot.gov>

Sent: Monday, February 27, 2023 8:39 AM

To: OIG/All Employees (b)(6)

Subject: Clips for Monday, February 27, 2023

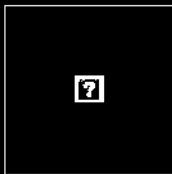
OF PARTICULAR NOTE

- **Pete Buttigieg Has Become the GOP's Favorite Lightning Rod for Controversy. Why Him?**
- **SpaceX Delays Launch of Astronaut Crew Set for International Space Station**
- **ABC News: Electric Vehicle Drivers Get Candid About Charging: 'Logistical Nightmare'**
- **Rail Industry Pushes Sensors Over Brakes After Ohio Train Crash**
- **Ohio: Contaminated Waste Shipments from Ohio Derailment to Resume**
- **Railroad Hazmat Incidents Decline but Carry Massive Financial Impacts**
- **Emboldened by its majority, House GOP turns up heat on federal workers**

From the weekend

- Feds probing Pennsylvania contract with MBTA's Chinese contractor *[OIG audit]*
- Federal DOT inspector general launches audit of CRRC contract with Philadelphia *[OIG audit]*
- Norfolk Southern Derailment Revives Railway Safety Battle In Washington
- From Shutdowns To Near-Misses, The FAA Is Ready For A Refresh
- Under Scrutiny From MBTA, CRRC Tries To Get Back On Track
- House Republicans Launch Probe of Buttigieg Response to Ohio Train Derailment
- Supply Chains Aren't Fixed, But They're Getting There
- Airport Runway Incidents Have Risen but Serious Close Calls Have Decreased Over 20 Years: FAA
- Pilot Halts Landing At California Airport In Latest Close-Call Incident
- After Republican Complaints, DOT Abandons Attempt To Discourage Highway Construction
- Railroad Hotboxes Are Focus of Ohio Derailment Probe. Here's How They Work.
- A First Report on the Ohio Toxic Train Wreck Was Released. Here's What it Found
- A Key Agency in the Ohio Train Derailment Response Hasn't Had a Confirmed Leader Since Biden Took Office
- POGO Podcast: Bad Watchdog (final episode)

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February 27, 2023
Department of Transportation
Daily News Briefing

Mobile version and searchable archives available at <https://dot.barbaricumanalytics.com>

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- Why Pete Buttigieg Isn't the Villain in the East Palestine Crash
- Fox News: Pete Buttigieg Is More Focused on Being on TV Instead of Solving Problems: Sen. Scott
- Nonsensical Narratives in East Palestine
- Pete Buttigieg Takes Thinly Veiled Swipe at Trump—'Isn't National Politics'
- Buttigieg Fires Back at Trump's Claims During East Palestine Visit
- Lauren Boebert Tells Buttigieg to Watch 'Thomas the Engine' in Ohio Attack

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DOT IN THE NEWS

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- Storm Brings Snow, Heavy Rain to Southern California, High Winds To The Southern Plains
- New York: Infrastructure Bill Bringing Hundreds of Millions to WNY – With More to Come

FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

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- Texas: San Marcos Regional Airport Sees Record Busy 2022
- Why Skipping Inflight Meals Could Be Good for the Planet
- Nevada: NTSB Says Medical Plane Apparently Broke Apart Before Crash
- SpaceX Delays Launch of Astronaut Crew Set for International Space Station
- New York: NYC Taxi Union Strikes at LaGuardia; Uber Says Rides Out of Airport Increased
- Minnesota: Duluth's Cirrus Aircraft Deals with Federal Fallout Due to Engine Supplier's Problems
- Oregon: FAA Approves Brookings Airport Grant
- Minnesota: Helicopter Hovers Around Buildings in Downtown Minneapolis
- Maine: Small Plane Crashes on Ebeemee Lake Saturday

FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

- ABC News: Electric Vehicle Drivers Get Candid About Charging: 'Logistical Nightmare'
- Nebraska: 'God's Country' In Growth's Crosshairs - Report Calls For New I-80 Interchange In Sarpy County
- Democratic Lawmakers in Pacific Northwest Steer Pay-Per-Mile into Slow Lane to Replace Gas Tax, Eventually

FEDERAL MOTOR CARRIER SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

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- NACFE Releases Report on 'Messy Middle' for Decarbonization of Trucking
 - Empowering Human Drivers with AI to Fix Road Safety

FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION

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 - Rail Industry Pushes Sensors Over Brakes After Ohio Train Crash
 - Union Pacific Plans to Name New CEO This Year
 - Railroad Deregulation Carries Steep Cost for Cities Like East Palestine
 - New York: Full LIRR Service at New Grand Central Madison Starts Monday
 - West Virginia: Bill Would Allow PSC Inquiries into Railroad Management, Penalties Included
 - Maine: What's Inside Maine Freight Trains? Public Can Only Hazard a Guess
 - North Carolina: Norfolk Southern Train Derails in Lexington ... No Hazmat, No Anger
 - Nebraska: Train Car Catches Fire West of Cozad

FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION

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- Massachusetts: MBTA Won't Roll Out \$935M Automated Fare Payment System in 2024
 - Colorado: RTD Makes Critical Changes to Union Station Bus Depot After Long List of Complaints: "That Was a Very Traumatic Experience"
 - Arkansas: Rock Region Metro Transit System Boss Awaits First Electric Buses
 - Connecticut: Attacks Are a Threat to CT Mass Transit Workers – and the Entire System
 - California: In Near Future, Golden Gate Transit Facing Harder Decisions Than Just Raising Fares
 - Minnesota: Metro Transit Expands On-Demand Pilot Program
 - Virginia: Attacks on Public Transit Drivers Could Become Crimes After New Bill Passes Virginia House
 - Maryland: Metro Tests Emergency Response at Wheaton Station

MARITIME ADMINISTRATION

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- South Carolina: SC Port Agency's Labor Dispute Is on A Fast Track After Appeals Court Reverses Itself

NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

- Bloomberg Investigation: Ford's Electric Pickup Is Built From Metal That's Damaging the Amazon
- Audi Could Build EVs in U.S. Thanks to Biden's Inflation Reduction Act
- Paccar Recalls Medium-Duty Trucks for Sudden Brake Failures
- Arizona: 2 Killed, 11 Injured After Pickup Truck Crashes into Group of Bicyclists
- Missouri: Four Killed, Four Critically Injured in Vehicle Crash Early Sunday at South Grand Boulevard and Forest Park Avenue
- Electric Car Companies: Automakers Finding Success with Electric Vehicles
- Tesla's Built-In Dashcam Crash Footage Proves Pickup Driver Lied

PIPELINE & HAZARDOUS MATERIALS SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

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- Railroad Hazmat Incidents Decline but Carry Massive Financial Impacts
- Nevada: Toxic Train Wreck in Ohio Hits Close to Home in Nevada
- Ohio: Ohio Among Worst in Nation for Train Accidents and Hazardous Material Spills, Our Investigation Finds
- Illinois: A Battle Simmers in Illinois Over Plans to Pipe in and Store Millions of Tons of Planet-Warming Carbon Dioxide Underground
- Iowa: Ethanol's Death Is Greatly Exaggerated
- Virginia: Train Wreck Readiness Part of Downtown Roanoke Evacuation Planning
- Indiana: Could the East Palestine, Ohio, Rail Disaster Happen Here? About 30 Trains Have Spilled Chemicals in Region Over Last Decade
- Iowa: Anti-CO2 Pipeline Bill Advances in Iowa

NATIONAL NEWS

- Lab Leak Most Likely Origin of Covid-19 Pandemic, Energy Department Now Says
- Biden's Student Loan Forgiveness Program Comes Before Supreme Court

Washington Schedule

Secretary in the News

Missouri: Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg to Visit New KC Airport, Future Panasonic Plant

Kansas City Star (2/26, Shorman) reports that U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg will speak about electric vehicles on Monday in a day-long trip to the Kansas City area that will include a tour of the future Panasonic battery plant and a visit to the new Kansas City International Airport terminal. Buttigieg is set to participate in an opening celebration for the airport terminal with Missouri Republican Gov. Mike Parson, Democratic Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas and other local officials in the morning. The new terminal will open to the public on Tuesday. He will then hold a news conference focused on electric vehicle manufacturing at the Panasonic battery plant site in De Soto. He will then visit the University of Missouri-Kansas City campus where he'll speak with students. The Panasonic plant is set to employ thousands of people. It will supply batteries to Tesla and other automakers and is part of a wave of new domestic manufacturing that federal officials hope will power a surging electric vehicle market. Buttigieg will be joined by Kansas Lt. Gov. David Toland and Rep. Sharice Davids, both Democrats, at the site. Buttigieg's visit will come just days after the secretary traveled to East Palestine, Ohio, the location of a toxic train derailment that has spurred fears of

contamination. The Biden administration, including Buttigieg, has faced sharp criticism from former President Donald Trump and other Republican politicians over its handling of the accident. KCIW (2/26, Swartz) reports that none of the events Buttigieg will be at will be open to the public. KSHB (2/26, Anstine) provides additional coverage.

Pete Buttigieg Has Become the GOP's Favorite Lightning Rod for Controversy. Why Him?

USA Today (2/23, Looker, Lee) notes that Pete Buttigieg's tenure as secretary of the Department of Transportation has hit many bumps in the road. And hitches in the supply chain. And turbulence in the air. Now, it's gone off the rails, Republicans say. The Transportation Department secretary and 2020 presidential candidate has become a lightning rod for controversy among the political right after landing squarely at the center of a series of crises on land and in the air. The latest – a train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio – prompted Republicans on the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability to announce Friday they were launching an investigation into Buttigieg's response to the accident. In a letter to Buttigieg announcing the probe, Republicans on the committee lambasted the transportation secretary who they say "ignored the catastrophe for over a week." The Feb. 3 crash spilled hazardous chemicals and caused health concerns among residents. Republicans are demanding an explanation for Buttigieg's "apathy" following the derailment. "The Biden administration may have done a lot of the right things behind the scenes in Ohio, but they missed the mark completely on the political value of showing up," said Rory Cooper, a longtime Republican strategist. The GOP's criticism of Buttigieg checks off two strategic boxes for the party: Targeting both Biden and a Democratic presidential hopeful, said Kyle Saunders, a political science professor at Colorado State University. "It's both a point scoring endeavor on the part of the Republicans to take Buttigieg down a notch or two but I think it's also a broader attempt to basically make the Biden administration look bad," he said.

Since President Joe Biden tapped Buttigieg to head the Transportation Department in 2021, the first openly gay cabinet secretary has dealt with supply chain shortages and airline challenges in addition to the catastrophic freight train accident. During Buttigieg's first year as transportation secretary, he faced inventory shortages, supply chain disruptions and congestion at shipping ports that impacted the global supply chain leading to increases in food and gas prices. While it's not clear what he could have done to alleviate a problem caused by factors beyond his control such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Republicans dubbed Buttigieg as "absent" during the crisis. The GOP also pointed fingers at Buttigieg after Southwest Airlines cancelled more than 15,000 flights last December and a computer glitch with the Federal Aviation Administration grounded more than 10,000 planes. "This is an example of private businesses acting poorly," said Darrell West, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution's Center for Technology Innovation. "And the failures were really their failures, not that of the Transportation Department." Dani Simons, the agency's spokesperson, said the supply chain issues are now largely resolved; airlines are being more "transparent and fair" with customers facing flight delays or cancellations; and Buttigieg has been using the Ohio train derailment to push for safety reforms. "He has repeatedly risen to meet the moment," said Simons in a statement to USA Today. Newsmax (2/26, Mack) and FISM TV (2/26, Tubbs) provide additional coverage of the House investigation of Secretary Buttigieg.

Why Pete Buttigieg Isn't the Villain in the East Palestine Crash

An opinion piece from MSNBC (2/26, Brown) argues that House Republicans want answers from Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg regarding his department's response after a Norfolk Southern Railway train derailed in East Palestine, Ohio, earlier this month. In a letter released Friday, House Oversight Chairman James Comer of Kentucky and other GOP members of the committee said that the Department of Transportation "needs to provide an explanation for its leadership's apathy in the face

of this emergency.” It’s a criticism that others have thrown Buttigieg’s way since the accident in which a controlled burn of the chemicals the train was carrying has prompted serious concerns about the long-term health and environmental impact of the crash. “I was taking pains to respect the role that I have and the role that I don’t have,” Buttigieg said during his visit to the town on Thursday, “but that should not have stopped me from weighing in about how I felt about what was happening to this community.” That mea culpa was welcome, but it also raised a question: What should the secretary of transportation’s role be in a crisis like this one? Because there seems to be an awful large disconnect between Buttigieg’s actual job and the things Republicans are hammering him over. Since becoming transportation secretary, Buttigieg has been one of the administration’s best communicators and the steward of billions of dollars worth of infrastructure funding. He’s also been in the bullseye as the point-person for the Biden administration’s response to the pandemic-fueled backlog in the supply chain that’s helped to boost inflation and last year’s cascade of canceled and delayed flights across major airlines.

But looking through the section of the U.S. Code that deals with the secretary’s duties, none of them seem immediately applicable to the crisis in East Palestine. There are likewise scant emergency or crisis powers offered to Buttigieg. The National Transportation Safety Board — which issued an initial report on the derailment on Thursday — is the primary body for determining the cause of the crash and issuing recommendations for the future. But contrary to what Comer and other Republicans seem to think, the board is independent, and not under Buttigieg’s control. The lesser-known Federal Railroad Administration’s Office of Railroad Safety, whose work does fall under his remit, also conducts investigations related to railway accidents. Dani Simons, a department spokesperson, tweeted last week that the Federal Railroad Administration’s Office of Railroad Safety and the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration had staff on the ground to aid the National Transportation Safety Board’s investigation within hours of the derailment. But there’s not much muscle behind the Federal Railroad Administration and other regulatory agencies that report to Buttigieg. As of 2013, according to a report from the Government Accountability Office, the Federal Railroad Administration’s inspectors had “the ability to annually inspect less than 1 percent of the railroad activities covered in regulation. As a result, railroads have the primary responsibility for safety of the railroad system.”

Not surprisingly, the railroad industry has been completely fine with this system, and has lobbied against attempts to increase regulation. Buttigieg has pledged to advance a long-stalled rule that would mandate that at least two crew members staff most railroad operations. It’s a common sense idea for trains that can now span as much as 3 miles. But given that the train had three crew members onboard at the time of the crash, it doesn’t sound like such a rule would have prevented this disaster. The department also said in a fact sheet that it would pursue other rules “to the extent possible under current statute, on high-hazard flammable trains (HHFT) and electronically controlled pneumatic brakes (ECP).” The caveat in that phrase is an important one that Republicans seeking answers from Buttigieg should clock well. There are a number of changes that Congress could make to improve railroad safety, including implementing past National Transportation Safety Board suggestions, giving the Federal Railroad Administration the teeth it needs to enforce its regulations and boosting the appallingly low amount of money that the government can fine negligent railway companies. But granting more power to the federal government is not exactly a GOP priority. Advocating for environmental justice to victims of industrial disasters hasn’t been at the top of the list for them either. Aside from going on TV to talk about the issue sooner, which I really doubt is something that Republicans want, it’s unclear exactly what they wanted Buttigieg to do. But when every crisis looks like a stick to hit a Democratic administration, I can’t blame them for deciding to take a whack at approximating concern.

Fox News: Pete Buttigieg Is More Focused on Being on TV Instead of Solving

Problems: Sen. Scott

In a video, Fox News (2/26) notes that Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., slammed Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg as a 'television personality' and failing to do his job amid an Ohio train derailment on 'Sunday Night in America.' In a video, Fox News (2/26) notes that Rep. James Comer, R-Ky., responds to the latest Fox News poll on Biden's approval, transportation crises under Sec. Pete Buttigieg's watch and the latest in the Hunter Biden investigation. In a video, Fox News (2/26) notes that Rep. Bill Johnson, R-Ohio, joins 'Sunday Night in America' to discuss President Biden and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg's handling of an Ohio train derailment.

Nonsensical Narratives in East Palestine

An editorial from *National Review* (2/26) argues that the National Transportation Safety Board's preliminary report on the February 3 Norfolk Southern train accident in East Palestine, Ohio, confirmed some details about the accident that earlier unofficial reports had stated. The cause of the accident was an overheating wheelset that caused a car in the middle of the train to derail. It was detected by a wayside safety device only after temperatures had reached dangerous levels. There is no evidence so far of wrongdoing, criminal or professional, by the train's crew or by responders. Further investigation will shine a light on whether wayside-device regulations should change, whether railroads' car-inspection standards are sufficient, and whether the decision to vent and burn the chemicals was the right one. It will not shine a light on whether the government should mandate paid sick leave for rail workers, protect union jobs from automation, or require expensive braking systems that make it more costly to transport fossil fuels. But that's where Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg's mind is, and progressive interest groups are thrilled. Not one part of the Department of Transportation's proposed policy response to the accident would have prevented the accident, and plenty of it is completely unrelated. In other words, it is much like progressives' response to mass shootings: calling for the same policies they wanted anyway, regardless of whether they'd be effective.

First responders were there right away. Norfolk Southern is conducting clean-up and environmental testing, and paying for all of it. State and federal environmental authorities are monitoring the air and water and making sure that Norfolk Southern's efforts are up to snuff. Ohio governor Mike DeWine (R.) has been on the scene and helping direct recovery efforts, reassuring residents that the tap water is safe by drinking it himself. State law-enforcement authorities in Ohio and Pennsylvania (East Palestine is near the border) are pursuing investigations. Class-action suits have been brought. Charities and churches have contributed supplies and shelter for affected residents. While Buttigieg is peddling a progressive narrative that has nothing to do with the accident, Trump is peddling a grievance narrative that has nothing to do with the accident. Both of them visited the town three weeks after the accident happened, which demonstrates how urgently they viewed the situation. Neither narrative is doing the people of East Palestine any good. Their town was the site of an industrial accident. They are individuals living in a specific community in distress, not political pawns to be used in the furtherance of a preconceived national story.

Pete Buttigieg Takes Thinly Veiled Swipe at Trump—'Isn't National Politics'

Newsweek (2/26, Anglesey) reports that Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg has taken a thinly veiled swipe at former President Donald Trump as he said the Ohio train derailment is not an issue of national politics or looking good. Speaking to MSNBC host Symond Sanders on Saturday, February 25, Buttigieg hit out at what he called attempts to misinform the residents of East Palestine. Buttigieg faced strong criticism from Republicans for not visiting the area in the aftermath of the February 3 derailment. He finally visited East Palestine earlier this week and was the first top member of the Joe Biden administration to do so. He said: "What I saw in the residents of East Palestine. People whose lives have been upended through no fault of their own, who have just shown remarkable resilience, and

are asking to make sure that they will be taken care of. "There has been so much information and, frankly, so much misinformation thrown at this community and thrown at this situation [that] a lot of them are asking who they can even trust and it's so important to continue to make sure that they can get good accurate information about the things that they care about most, which isn't national politics, or who looks good, or who looks bad." He continued: "It's continuing to know that their air, water, and soil is going to be safe, that their homes are going to be safe. "That is what anyone would want to know in this situation. You can feel a sense of fatigue with all of the kind of politics swirling around their community." Daily Wire (2/27) provides additional coverage.

Buttigieg Fires Back at Trump's Claims During East Palestine Visit

In a video, CNN (2/26) reports that Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg responded to criticism from former President Donald Trump during their respective visits to East Palestine, Ohio.

Lauren Boebert Tells Buttigieg to Watch 'Thomas the Engine' in Ohio Attack

Newsweek (2/23, Anglesey) reports that Representative Lauren Boebert (CO-R) hit out at Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg and called on him to watch "Thomas the Engine" amid the fallout from the train derailment in Ohio. The firebrand Republican voiced her frustration with Buttigieg during an appearance on the Fox News show *Unfiltered*, with Dan Bongino, as conservatives continue to criticize the White House's response to the derailment. During the exchange, Boebert referred to the children's TV series *Thomas & Friends*, originally known as *Thomas the Tank Engine*, as essential watching for Buttigieg. She said: "He (Buttigieg) said he lost his train of thought, while Americans are losing many things under his leadership as the Secretary of Transportation and I think he needs to watch more of Thomas the [Tank] Engine to really understand how our infrastructure works. "But wasn't Pete Buttigieg saying we have too many white, male construction workers and here he is dressed in cosplay as a white, male construction worker while President [Donald] Trump was delivering real victories for the American people, providing the needs that they needed in that moment and that time." The clip, shared on Twitter by the account @Acyn on February 25, has been seen some 328,200 times since being uploaded onto the social media account. Former President Donald Trump slammed Buttigieg's visit to East Palestine and claimed he "played to very small crowds." Newsweek has contacted Buttigieg's office for comment.

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Deputy Secretary in the News

New York: Getting to the Bottom of It: Why Staten Island Is the Only NYC Borough Without a Bike Share Program

Staten Island Advance (2/26, Bascome) reports that throughout history, Staten Islanders have grown accustomed to not having the same level of access to public transportation options as the other four boroughs. Just look at the fact that Staten Island is still the only borough that doesn't connect to New York City's subway system. Well, the borough's exclusion from basic transportation services provided to the rest of the city has extended to bike share, with NYC's Citi Bike program operating in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx; everywhere besides Staten Island. There had been efforts to bring separate, smaller-scale bike share programs to Staten Island, including a short-lived pilot program by JUMP and Lime in 2018, but after that, the plan to bring Beryl bikes to the borough fell flat, with the company pulling out of its agreement at the last minute due to complications associated with the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. But why does Staten Island need its own, separate bike share program to begin with? Why not just include Staten Island in the massive Citi Bike program that's already available in every other borough?

Citi Bike, which launched in 2013 and has since grown into one of the world's largest bike share programs, is operated as a public-private partnership between New York City and Lyft, which acquired the previous operator Motivate in 2018. The program originally launched in Manhattan and Downtown Brooklyn, incrementally expanding to Queens and the Bronx over the past 10 years. By the end of the current \$100 million Phase 3 expansion, Citi Bike will cover 70 square miles with over 40,000 bikes across four boroughs by the end of 2024, stated the NYC Streets Plan, released in December 2021. At that point, over 50% of all New York City residents will live within a five-minute walk of a Citi Bike station, according to the document, but none of those people will be Staten Islanders. So why is that? Citi Bike does not receive any subsidies from New York City. All implementation and expansion costs have been privately funded, with those costs later recouped through the revenue generated by those who pay to use the program. With Staten Islanders historically cycling at a lower rate than the rest of the city, some said they believe that the reason the borough hasn't been included in any Citi Bike expansion to date is that the company does not think it would be utilized enough to justify the costs of installation and upkeep.

In July 2018, during City Hall in Your Borough, dockless bikes from two different companies — JUMP and Lime — arrived on Staten Island's North Shore. Unlike the Citi Bike program, where riders are required to rent and return bikes at stations around the city, the dockless bike share program did not have physical dock stations, allowing riders to park almost anywhere within the area limits. The initial pilot on Staten Island's North Shore launched on July 26, 2018, with 400 bikes -- 200 from JUMP and 200 from Lime. The program ran for roughly a year and a half, with both companies removing their bikes from Staten Island streets in late 2019. The DOT received overwhelmingly positive feedback from Staten Island residents regarding the initial bike share pilot program, with 74% of respondents deeming dockless bike share "a great service for the city." In November 2019, the DOT announced that Beryl would operate Staten Island's next bike share program, which was initially scheduled to begin in spring 2020. However, as spring 2020 came to a close, the mint green bicycles had yet to hit Staten Island streets. "Beryl was scheduled to launch in spring 2020, however, due to the COVID-19 health crisis, the launch was delayed. DOT and Beryl are working closely to launch as soon as operationally and logistically feasible," the DOT said in June 2020. Had the program actually launched, it would have only operated within practically the same service area — along portions of the North and East shores — as the previous bike share program, operated by JUMP and Lime, despite DOT initially touting the program as a borough-wide bike share. On Nov. 13, 2019, the DOT announced via press release that, "A new bike share provider, Beryl, will provide borough-wide service in the spring with over 1,000 new bikes." "This next exciting phase of our bike share pilot will allow us to work with a promising company to deliver a great and convenient transportation option to all of Staten Island," former DOT Commissioner Polly Trottenberg said at the time. "We look forward to sharing more details of Beryl's plans in the months ahead — and this spring, we look forward to welcoming brand-new and distinctive Beryl bikes to all of 'The Rock.'" However, the DOT reneged in February 2020, stating that the new bike share would launch within essentially the same service area as the previous bike share, with plans to expand to the rest of the borough after the initial launch.

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DOT in the News

Europe Banks on Its €72 Billion to Counter Biden's Green Payouts

Bloomberg (2/26, Bravo) notes that Europe's initial anger at President Joe Biden's massive green subsidy plan has waned in light of assessments that rank EU incentives to boost clean technology as equal to or surpassing some of the benefits offered in the US law. Now that some EU officials no longer

regard the IRA as a threat in the race to support climate-friendly domestic manufacturing, many in Europe are instead shifting their focus to China, which they believe presents a much greater risk, said the people, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. When the US law was passed last year, many European leaders lashed out at it as an attempt to steal investment dollars.

While the IRA will be a boon for investment in the US, the extent to which that comes at the expense of Europe will be “absolutely marginal,” Jacob Kirkegaard, a senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund, said in an interview. “A lot of European businesses are going to invest in the US, but that’s market development, that’s going where the growth is,” Kirkegaard said. “That doesn’t mean they’re going to relocate from Europe — because the reality is they’re going to be investing massively in Europe as well.” Nearly every EU member state provides some form of support to boost electric vehicle sales, including bonuses worth as much as €10,000. The bloc’s recovery fund also provides more than €11 billion toward low-emission mobility initiatives, such as electric vehicles and powering stations. One lingering worry, however, is that IRA tax credits could have a longer-term impact on automotive supply chains, and that investments might be diverted to the US so long as the incentives continue to align with assembly requirements there, the people said.

Meanwhile, The Times (2/27, Khan, Godsen, Jones) adds that the global green industry has responded quickly. Last week Tesla became one of the first groups to announce a strategy shift prompted by the lure of subsidies. Elon Musk’s electric carmaker said it had begun assembling batteries in Germany but would focus its battery-cell production in the US to take advantage of the act’s tax breaks. On the same day Stellantis, a rival car producer, said it was already localising production in America. And on Friday the boss of Audi said the German automotive group may build a factory in the United States, alone or with its parent Volkswagen.

Faced by a potential deindustrialisation of Europe, Brussels has tried to convince Biden to amend the legislation to give European carmakers the same access to tax breaks that trading partners such as Mexico and Canada qualify for — but its attempts have been in vain. Democrats in Washington have refused to reopen a law that passed through Congress and the Senate in August. One senior EU official lamented that Brussels had made little headway, with only minor amendments of the law due when Washington publishes a revised version next month.

Amid the diplomatic wrangling, American state-level officials have begun touring the world to invite companies to set up clean energy projects. Representatives of Ohio are visiting Britain each quarter to meet business leaders in the solar, green hydrogen and electric vehicle supply chain sectors. America has been caught off-guard by the complaints of transatlantic allies, many of which initially had welcomed the IRA as an important milestone in the global ambition to limit global warming to below 2C. But climate change activists and US government officials say the backlash is overblown, as Washington will still spend comparatively little on subsidising green investments compared with its peers. Spread over ten years, the IRA accounts for only 0.2 per cent of US GDP. By contrast, the cumulative impact of existing incentive schemes and public funding in the EU adds up to nearly 0.5 per cent of GDP.

Storm Brings Snow, Heavy Rain to Southern California, High Winds To The Southern Plains

NBC News (2/26, Romero, Alsharif) reports that a cold front turbocharged by tropical precipitation brought rare snow and heavy rain to some urban Southern California rooftops over the weekend, with more in the forecast. Late-winter extreme weather Sunday also impacted the Midwest and Plains states. The leading edge of California's weekend storm was headed east and wreaking havoc as it

continued to draw warm energy and clash with cold air, federal forecasters said. A squall line was marching through Oklahoma on Sunday, with multiple tornado and severe thunderstorm warnings in effect. The National Weather Service office in Norman, Oklahoma, called the front a "remarkable, perhaps historic storm system." New York Times (2/26, Chung, Albeck-Ripka) adds that wind gusts of 114 miles per hour were recorded in Hall County, Texas, Mr. Chenard said. The Weather Service also reported widespread gusts ranging from 70 to 90 miles per hour in southwest Oklahoma.

New York: Infrastructure Bill Bringing Hundreds of Millions to WNY – With More to Come

Buffalo News (2/26, Zremski) notes that shovels haven't hit the ground yet in many cases, but 2023 should be the year when the Buffalo area and the rest of the country start seeing the roadwork and other improvements called for in the \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill that Congress passed 15 months ago. At least \$271 million is already on its way to the region, according to a Buffalo News tally of the projects announced to date. And that figure is an understatement, in that it doesn't include money first sent to the state and then passed on to localities – and because it only includes projects announced in the first 15 months of a bill that will dole out federal money over five years.

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Federal Aviation Administration

JetBlue CEO Promises to Retain Spirit's South Florida Staff, If Airline Deal Gets U.S. Clearance

Miami Herald (2/26, Kaiser) reports that last year, JetBlue's unsolicited takeover bid for Spirit Airlines rocked financial markets and the aviation industry, after the Broward County airline already had said it would merge with ultra-low-fare rival Frontier Airlines. The New York-based airline's cash offer to acquire Spirit sparked a contentious, monthslong bidding war and culminated with Spirit's shareholders agreeing in October to sell the company to JetBlue for \$3.8 billion. Closing the deal awaits federal regulatory approval. Ted Christie, Spirit's CEO, said in a February call with industry analysts that the Miramar-based airline was expecting news from the Department of Justice within 30 days about whether regulators would allow the sale to go through or sue to block the deal. A larger JetBlue, after absorbing Spirit, would be run by Robin Hayes, 56, JetBlue's CEO. Hayes is a lifetime airline professional. A London native, he started a front desk job at British Airways' terminals in 1989, then worked his way up to run British Airways' operations in the United States. In 2009, Hayes joined JetBlue as chief commercial officer and became CEO in 2015. Pending approval from federal authorities, he's poised to run the nation's fifth-largest airline with significant operations in Florida. The Miami Herald recently spoke with Hayes about his plans for a bigger JetBlue, the expected fate of Spirit's 3,400 South Florida employees and the planned new Spirit headquarters under construction in Dania Beach. This interview was edited for length and clarity.

Texas: San Marcos Regional Airport Sees Record Busy 2022

San Antonio Express-News (2/26, Blanks) reports that from the perch on top of the air traffic control tower, the San Marcos Regional Airport is a sprawling, busy network of runways, construction activity, hangars and maintenance facilities. André Murphy, the air traffic control tower manager who has been with the San Marcos airport since 2014, has had a literal bird's-eye view of the explosive growth the facility has experienced in the past decade. He says the airport has become increasingly popular with flight schools, which has bolstered the facility's reputation and contributed to the busiest year on record for the WWII-era airport. "Once the word got out about this place, it just didn't stop," he said. The San Marcos Regional Airport had its busiest year on record in 2022, logging more than 91,000 operations — that's takeoffs and landings — for the year. Its busiest month was September, with more

than 10,000 operations in that month alone. That's about 250 takeoffs and landings each day, according to Jim Wimberly, the president of Texas Aviation Partners, which is the private firm contracted by the city of San Marcos to operate the airport. Having a private contractor run a city airport is an unusual arrangement in terms of airport operations in the state of Texas - most airports, like San Antonio and Austin, for instance, are operated by their respective cities. But TAP entered into an agreement with the city almost 13 years ago to take over the airport and help get it out of a financial hole, which it has. "Cities do a lot of things well, like traditional city responsibilities" of fire, police, and roads, said Wimberly, a former Southwest Airlines chief operating officer of more than 20 years. "But they don't always have the expertise to operate airports."

The San Marcos Regional Airport doesn't have any scheduled passenger airliners. You won't go there to catch your Southwest flight to Hawaii or your Delta airbus to Walt Disney World. You would go there if you live in Central Texas and are interested in learning how to become a pilot, though. A host of flight schools call the airport home, training the next generation of commercial and private aviators to help fill the nationwide pilot shortage. The airport also hosts a fleet of private corporate jets, cargo operations and commercial aviation centers. At least 240 airplanes of varying shapes and sizes call the airport home at any given time. "There's more corporate activity, more flight training, and, frankly, more aircraft and businesses based here than there were four years ago," Wimberly said. The San Marcos airport is also home to Berry Aviation, a fixed base operator that essentially acts as a convenience store or pit stop for planes that are passing through on their way to other destinations and need to refuel, get maintenance, restock catering or other services. Berry also has a charter fleet and military contracts and has one of the largest presences at the airport. Importantly, the San Marcos Regional Airport is also the designated overflow air strip for when the Austin or San Antonio airports get too busy or otherwise can't handle the traffic. That doesn't happen often — it most recently happened a few years ago when Austin's air traffic control tower flooded.

Why Skipping Inflight Meals Could Be Good for the Planet

CNN (2/26, Marcus) reports that currently, the "skip meal" option is only available to some passengers flying in Delta's business class Delta One cabin. A rep from the airline tells CNN that since the program started last year, about 1,000-1,500 meals are voluntarily declined each month. That means only .3% of eligible passengers are opting out. But it's a test case for what airlines could do to reduce fuel, costs and waste on board. According to airlines, the "no meals" option isn't just about being eco-friendly. It's also about personalization. "We're always looking for ways to better serve our customers and create a more personalized onboard experience," says a rep from Delta. Meals also represent an opportunity for airlines to gather more customer data and potentially better optimize catering options. Critics of meal-skipping programs say that airlines might be "greenwashing" by trying to hide a corner-cutting measure under the veneer of sustainability. In 2020, when JAL launched its meal-skipping option, the airline offered fliers a complimentary amenity kit in exchange for passing on a meal. One critic, Gary Leff of the blog View from the Wing, called the amenity kit "a token" and argued that the program put too much onus on the passenger to make a change rather than the airline itself. "I suppose it's ethical of Japan Airlines to save money by reducing food waste, but is it an ethical obligation for the passenger to make their meal decisions at least 25 hours prior to departure, in other words, to know whether their future self is going to be hungry?" he wrote. The JAL program began as a test on a few limited routes. Now, it's available for passengers in any class of service on any international flight. Originally, it was called the "ethical meal skip option," but the word "ethical" has been dropped since then. The amenity kit offer has ended, replaced by a partnership with a charity called Table for Two. The airline says that for each meal foregone, it will donate a small amount to this charity, which provides school lunches to children living in poverty. However, the airline doesn't specify how much money it donates or which schools or regions are served.

Nevada: NTSB Says Medical Plane Apparently Broke Apart Before Crash

AP (2/26) reports that a medical transport flight that crashed in a mountainous area in northern Nevada, killing five all five people aboard the plane including a patient, apparently broke apart before hitting the ground, authorities said Sunday. The National Transportation Safety Board has sent in a seven-member team of investigators to the site of Friday night's crash near Stagecoach. "How do we know if the airplane broke up in flight? We found parts of the airplane one-half to three-quarters of a mile away" from the crash scene, NTSB Vice Chair Bruce Landsberg said at a news briefing in Carson City. Landsberg said in the afternoon briefing that a team spent all day looking for pieces of the downed plane. He added investigators would likely be on site for several days before the wreckage of the single-engine Pilatus PC-12 is moved so investigators can try to determine a possible crash cause. The plane was built in 2002. "Right now, we just don't know. This is like a three dimensional puzzle," Landsberg said. "It's harder when you don't have the pieces all in one place." The crash occurred amid a winter storm warning issued by the National Weather Service in Reno for large swaths of Nevada, including parts of Lyon County. It was snowing steadily with winds around 20 mph and gusts up to 30 mph. Care Flight, which provides ambulance service by plane and helicopter, identified the downed aircraft and said the pilot, a flight nurse, a flight paramedic, a patient and a patient's family member all died. Care Flight officials said it was halting all flights and will work with each of its operations to determine when it will return to service. According to the Federal Aviation Administration, the plane was registered to Guardian Flight, based in South Jordan, Utah. Care Flight is a service of REMSA Health in Reno and Guardian Flight. Fox Business (2/26, Betz) provides additional coverage.

SpaceX Delays Launch of Astronaut Crew Set for International Space Station

Washington Post (2/26, Davenport) reports that SpaceX was forced to delay the launch of its sixth full contingent of astronauts to the International Space Station early Monday, as it hoped to continue an unparalleled launch cadence of its Falcon 9 rocket. The launch was scrubbed within three minutes of the 1:45 a.m. scheduled liftoff time because of an issue with loading the liquid used to ignite the rocket's propellants. NASA and SpaceX have said they would try to launch again early Tuesday. The Crew-6 astronauts — two Americans, a Russian and an astronaut from the United Arab Emirates — were originally scheduled to lift off from the Kennedy Space Center at 1:45 a.m. Monday and dock their Dragon spacecraft at the space station early Tuesday. The rescheduled launch comes as NASA and Russia continue to investigate what caused two Russian spacecraft — one designed for human spaceflight, the other for cargo only — to spring oddly similar coolant leaks within a couple of months of each other while attached to the space station. Russia launched a replacement capsule to the station on Thursday that is to retrieve a pair of Russian cosmonauts and a NASA astronaut. That capsule docked Saturday evening. Speaking to reporters late Saturday, Dana Weigel, NASA's space station deputy program manager, said that "it's still an ongoing assessment. They're still taking a really close look at all the information they have on both spacecraft to try to understand if there's any common cause or anything else that could have been a causal factor and having those two radiator panel leaks."

She added that Russian officials at Roscosmos, the Russian space agency, "are sharing the information with us." Roscosmos also did another set of inspections of the rescue spacecraft launched last week to retrieve NASA astronaut Frank Rubio as well as Russian cosmonauts Sergey Prokopyev and Dmitri Petelin. "They inspected it," she said. "They looked at the radiators, the solar arrays, and they couldn't find anything at all anomalous. But that doesn't mean they're done investigating." While Boeing is still pushing toward its first human spaceflight mission with its Starliner spacecraft, SpaceX has sped ahead, launching a number of crews to orbit, as it continues a brisk and unparalleled cadence that included 61 orbital launches last year, most of them for its Starlink internet satellite constellation. This year, the company says it is pushing for as many as 100 flights. "But above all, the priority is the crew flights and crew safety," said Benji Reed, SpaceX's senior director of human spaceflight programs. "And also

meeting our obligations to ensure the crew rotation on the space station. That will always take precedence over any of the other flights.” The company is now gearing up to launch Starship, its massive, fully reusable two-stage rocket, which would become the most powerful ever to fly. The Starship launch, which is still awaiting approval from the Federal Aviation Administration, could come as early as next month from the company’s facility in South Texas on the Gulf of Mexico. NASA will be watching to see how the vehicle performs. The space agency is investing \$2.9 billion in the vehicle and intends to use it to ferry astronauts to and from the surface of the moon as part of its Artemis program.

New York: NYC Taxi Union Strikes at LaGuardia; Uber Says Rides Out of Airport Increased

Fox Business (2/26, Wehner) reports that Uber officials said rides out of LaGuardia International Airport are up 36% on Sunday, despite a union’s attempt to stop all rideshare trips out of the New York City airport for unfair wages. The New York Taxi Workers Alliance, or NYTWA, boasts a membership of 25,000 professional drivers, which includes taxicab and rideshare workers. The union planned to go on strike at LaGuardia airport on Feb. 26 by refusing to pick up Uber and Lyft rides between 12 p.m. and 12 a.m. after a raise for all NYTWA members that was expected to go into effect on Dec. 19, 2022, was stopped by Uber. The raise would have meant a 7.3% increase in the per minute rate and a per mile rate increase of 24% for Uber and Lyft drivers because of rising costs. "As with the last couple of times, the taxi industry 'protest' has had no impact on Uber," Uber spokeswoman Freddi Goldstein said on Sunday. "The taxi association should focus on issues that actually resonate with drivers, like the TLC's universally hated lockout rule, rather than PR stunts."

Minnesota: Duluth's Cirrus Aircraft Deals with Federal Fallout Due to Engine Supplier's Problems

Duluth News Tribune (2/26, Passi) reports that Cirrus Aircraft has a difficult situation on its hands, following the Federal Aviation Administration’s decision Thursday to issue an airworthiness directive that effectively grounds many of the company’s recently produced piston-engine airplanes until they can be inspected. At issue is a manufacturing error discovered by Continental Aerospace Technologies, Cirrus’ supplier of engines for its two most popular plane models, the SR22 and the turbocharged SR22T. Crankshafts in some of Continental’s engines produced between June 2021 and February 2023 were improperly assembled, making them susceptible to catastrophic failure. The Cirrus SR22 involved in last week’s fatal crash in the St. Louis River had an airworthiness date of 2016 and was registered in 2020, according to data from flight-tracking website FlightAware. After learning of the problem from Continental, Cirrus notified customers Feb. 8 that it had decided to ground SR22s and SR22Ts in its own company fleet “out of an abundance of caution” until they could be inspected and verified as safe for flight. The FAA directive published this past week in the Federal Register makes it illegal to fly any plane with one of the suspect engines until it can be inspected and repaired, if necessary. The FAA document explained that “because of the urgency of the unsafe condition, this AD requires inspection of any affected crankshaft assembly before further flight.” The sole exception is for airplanes that must be relocated by means of a single flight to access the nearest qualified service center. The types of engines in question come standard equipped in both the SR22 and SR22T. In all, Cirrus shipped at least 663 airplanes of those makes within the time frame identified as a period of concern, according to stats from the General Aviation Manufacturers Association. Those numbers do not include any aircraft delivered in 2023, as GAMA’s shipment report is issued on a quarterly basis. Cirrus reported that it believes roughly 690 aircraft will be affected but not every airplane shipped within the identified time frame. A list of specific engine serial numbers requiring inspection has been issued as part of the order.

Oregon: FAA Approves Brookings Airport Grant

Curry Coastal Pilot (2/26) reports that the Brookings City Council approved the contract with Century

West for phase 1 for the Airport Improvement Plan. The City's match is 10 percent of the approximate \$67,000 Federal Aviation Agency grant which will rehabilitate and seal the main apron area and seal several taxiways. City funding comes from the Airport Capital Outlay fund. Contractor Century West expects the project to be completed by September 30.

Minnesota: Helicopter Hovers Around Buildings in Downtown Minneapolis

KMSP (2/26) reports that a helicopter pilot maneuvered between buildings in downtown Minneapolis on Sunday as crews worked to replace an HVAC system on top of U.S. Bank Plaza. The work on Sunday was part two of a job that started last weekend. Streets and sidewalks around the plaza were closed during the morning hours for the job. In a tweet, the City of Minneapolis says the use of a helicopter for work on buildings when construction cranes aren't feasible. The city added that the city, police, Metro Transit, the FAA, and Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport all helped with the planning for the project.

Maine: Small Plane Crashes on Ebeemee Lake Saturday

WAB (2/26) reports that a small plane crashed Saturday on Ebeemee Lake in Piscataquis County. Brownville Fire says it happened just after noon during a ski plane fly-in event. Two people inside the plane were sent to a local hospital with minor injuries. The Federal Aviation Administration and the NTSB will investigate.

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Federal Highway Administration

ABC News: Electric Vehicle Drivers Get Candid About Charging: 'Logistical Nightmare'

ABC News (2/26, Korn) notes that YouTube personality Steve Hammes leased a Hyundai Kona Electric sport utility vehicle for his 17-year-old daughter Maddie for three reasons: it was affordable, practical and allowed Maddie to put her cash toward college, not fuel. Now, the upstate New York resident has a dilemma many EV owners can relate to: finding available charging stations far away from home. "We're going through the planning process of how easily Maddie can get from Albany to Gettysburg [College] and where she can charge the car," Hammes told ABC News. "It makes me a little nervous. We want fast chargers that take 30 to 40 minutes -- it would not make sense to sit at a Level 2 charger for hours. There isn't a good software tool that helps EV owners plan their trips."

Last week the Biden administration said Tesla would open its Supercharger network to non-Tesla owners by the end of 2024. The plan includes 3,500 Tesla fast chargers and 4,000 of its slower, Level 2 chargers -- a small number in Tesla's sprawling network. Setting up an account on Tesla's app is also required for access. President Joe Biden prioritized emissions-free vehicles in the 2021 infrastructure law, vowing to increase the number of green vehicles on America's highways and local roads. The president's goals include installing 500,000 new chargers across the U.S. and dramatically boosting EV sales by 2030. Voelcker said he's seen little improvement in the nation's charging infrastructure in the last four years and frequently hears complaints of dead chargers and sticky cables. "The incentive right now is to get stations in the ground," he said. "It's not making sure they actually work."

Tony Quiroga, editor-in-chief of Car and Driver, has been forced to wander the aisles of a Walmart in Burbank, California, while the EV he's testing that day sits and charges. He's become a familiar face at a Mexican restaurant in Mohave, California, where a Tesla charger is located. A coffee shop recently opened nearby that caters specifically to EV drivers. "I imagine an ecosystem will be built around charging stations eventually," he told ABC News. "Longer trips bring up flaws with EVs. People are leery of taking them on long trips -- that's why older EVs don't have 40,000 miles on them."

Sandwich chain Subway announced Wednesday it was partnering with GenZ EV Solutions to build "Oasis Parks" at select dining locations. EV customers can expect charging canopies with multiple ports, picnic tables, Wi-Fi, restrooms, green space and playgrounds to make the charging experience more "seamless," Subway said. Last March Swedish automaker Volvo and Starbucks said they were teaming up to install as many as 60 DC fast chargers at 15 Starbucks stores along a 1,350-mile route that spans from Seattle to Denver.

Quiroga's sister, who lives in Northern California, takes her internal combustion car -- not her Tesla Model S -- when she needs to drive across the state. Even Quiroga's team of reporters has to carefully plan and calculate how far EV charging stations are when they conduct comparison tests among manufacturers. "These comparisons tests are a logistical nightmare. We plan meals around recharging the vehicles," he said. "We need to have the battery at 100% or close to it to test a vehicle's performance. We have to time everything -- it requires more work." In December, Quiroga was in Florida driving BMW's luxury i7 all-electric sedan. He watched as its range dropped from 240 miles to 220 as soon as he turned on the heat. "You use the luxuries ... and the range plummets," he said.

Nebraska: 'God's Country' In Growth's Crosshairs - Report Calls For New I-80 Interchange In Sarpy County

Omaha World-Herald (2/26, Liewer) reports that there's an unbroken 7-mile stretch of Interstate 80 at Omaha's southwest extreme that feels to some like stepping back in time. Residential and industrial growth between Gretna, Papillion and Springfield have squeezed the capacity on the two-lane roads that service the area, causing traffic jams at the two interchanges that bookend the bucolic stretch of freeway. Faced with that reality, area planners are recommending construction of a new I-80 interchange, with 192nd Street/Capehart Road as the best option among six locations along the route. A second choice was identified at 168th Street/Schram Road. The recommendations come from a 2½-year study by the planning agency, in cooperation with Sarpy County and the cities of Papillion and Gretna, on how best to address traffic on I-80 in western Sarpy County. The resulting report was released earlier this month, marking an important step for a proposal that is still years away from becoming reality. "We're really thinking about this through the lens of access to I-80," said Mike Helgerson, executive director of the planning agency. "(The roads) are failing today. And with the anticipated growth, they're going to degrade even further." State Sen. Jen Day's district includes the area encompassed in the study, and she has experienced the longstanding traffic woes. "Anyone who lives in the area knows how congested it is," she said. "It slows everything down. I think the growth in western Sarpy County has far surpassed the need for this."

Democratic Lawmakers in Pacific Northwest Steer Pay-Per-Mile into Slow Lane to Replace Gas Tax, Eventually

OPB (2/26, Banse) notes: Would you prefer to pay a couple of cents for every mile you drive in exchange for not having to pay gas tax or those steep electric car registration fees? A mileage-based tax is the top choice of Pacific Northwest policymakers to make up for the long-term decline in gas tax revenue. But the imposition of any new tax tends to be politically fraught, and this one is no exception. On Tuesday, Washington state legislators began discussing whether to copy Oregon's voluntary pay-by-the-mile program with an eye toward getting electric car drivers used to the idea first. Meanwhile, a Democratic state representative in Salem introduced a bill to make the Oregon road usage charge mandatory for vehicles that get 30 mpg or better beginning with the 2028 model year.

The proposed transition to taxing drivers by the mile is provoking backseat griping, though. Longtime anti-tax activist Tim Eyman and groups such as Conservative Ladies of Washington urged their followers this week to bombard legislators with messages in opposition to the pay-per-mile tax. Eyman re-posted

testimony he delivered to the state House last year to underscore his concern that the mileage-based tax would be an added burden on drivers rather than simply a replacement. “I’m frustrated and angry on behalf of a lot of taxpayers that feel like they’re just getting nicked and dined to death,” Eyman said. “This is so discriminatory to people that are living in rural areas that have to drive a long distance just to get around.”

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Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration

NACFE Releases Report on ‘Messy Middle’ for Decarbonization of Trucking

Transport Topics (2/27, Clevinger) reports that the North American Council for Freight Efficiency has released a new report examining the myriad powertrain decisions trucking companies will face on the industry’s journey toward decarbonization. The report, dubbed “The Messy Middle: A Time for Action,” examines the long period of transition from today’s diesel-powered trucks to a future state when the industry has fully shifted to zero-emission freight movement. In the years ahead, fleets will be able to choose from an expanding menu of powertrain options, including advanced diesel trucks, renewable fuels, natural gas, hydrogen combustion engines, hybrids, battery-electric vehicles and hydrogen fuel cells. The report, which focuses primarily on longhaul Class 8 trucking, analyzes the benefits and challenges of each option and provides a decision-making framework designed to help fleets evaluate their choices during this “messy middle” period. This time of transition is already under way, said NACFE Executive Director Mike Roeth. “Trucking is decarbonizing,” he said. “We are doing it in a lot of different ways, from the better efficiency of diesel trucks, going to zero with battery-electric and hydrogen, and finally looking at these alternatives in the messy middle.”

Jeff Seger, NACFE’s clean energy consultant and the lead author of the report, outlined several key factors that will influence future powertrain decisions, including stricter emission regulations, fuel and energy prices and the push toward environmental sustainability. “What we’re seeing is the model is clearly changing for fleets,” Seger said.

Empowering Human Drivers with AI to Fix Road Safety

Supply & Demand Chain Executive (2/26, Johnson) notes that some of the world’s most sophisticated vehicle makers and technologists are investing heavily in autonomous trucking. There’s truck builders such as Daimler Truck Group and Volvo Trucks and autonomous driving technology companies like Waymo and Aurora. Meanwhile, states like California are working to prohibit fully autonomous trucks. Waymo and TuSimple are laying off employees and TuSimple is scaling back freight expansion. While it’s safe to say that signals are mixed, the industry has made considerable progress on commercial vehicle autonomy over the last several years. Currently, level 1 and level 2 autonomy – such as cruise control, steering and acceleration/deceleration – are commercially available. Level 3 and level 4 automation – where the vehicle is operating fully on its own in most or all scenarios – are being prototyped and tested. Level 5 automation is the only level where the driver is not there to assist. The computer is expected to perform equal or better to a human driver in all scenarios and conditions. Autonomous trucking has the potential to deliver considerable safety improvements, but trucking is a more complex autonomy problem than passenger transport for 2 simple reasons — mass and velocity. Tens of thousands of pounds traveling at highway speeds mean the consequence of failure is catastrophic.

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Federal Railroad Administration

Millions of Americans Are Being Kept in the Dark About Toxic Trains Rumbling

Through Their Neighborhoods as Railroad Companies Refuse to Disclose Which Carry Hazardous Loads

Daily Mail (2/26, Woodfield) reports that millions of Americans are being kept in the dark about secretive toxic trains like the one that has devastated East Palestine and are moving regularly through their communities. Railroad companies disclose general information on hazardous loads to local authorities and emergency services – but only when asked and even then they only give rough expected annual figures. Specific details on train times and exact hazmat loads are treated as 'sensitive information' by the rail operators and are not disclosed, regulator the Federal Railroad Administration revealed to Daily Mail. And while local officials may have a small amount of general information, millions of average folk living near tracks have no means of knowing exactly what is passing close to their homes, or the potential for another East Palestine 'bomb' train. The United States has 141,000 miles of freight train track. And an FRA spokesperson told Daily Mail: 'What is carried and when it is carried is sensitive to the rail companies. 'It is not something that is widely disclosed. It is not widely publicly available. There are certain materials that are security sensitive and rail companies don't want that information out there. They don't want to induce or entice someone to potentially do harm.'

The spokesperson admitted it was virtually impossible for ordinary members of the public to track toxic trains near them. 'There is no way anyone could put a map together of train routes carrying hazmat materials at any one time,' they continued. Only local authorities or emergency services can access any information, and that is often very general. 'If they are competent and if they are engaged, they can request from a railroad a list of all the hazmat commodities that go through the community on an annual basis,' said the FRA. 'The railroad would give them a list, per annum. It's not on a weekly, daily, monthly, basis. It's here's what we've moved through in the last year and here's what we intend to move in the near future. But it is not going to be specific quantities or specific dates or times.'

Asked if there was any way an average person could know what is being transported on a rail track behind their back yard, the spokesperson replied: 'No.' They added: 'We do not track train movements in real time. There's no comparison to the air traffic control system. There is no centralized rail traffic control center. 'But I understand the questions you're asking. People would like to know what is going through their community.' The lack of public transparency is revealed as people in East Palestine continue to distrust the quality of their drinking water and air despite assurances last week by Environmental Protection Agency director Michael Regan that town supplies are safe. 'None of this infrastructure is owned by the government, it is all privately owned,' said the FRA spokesperson. 'This is their property, their operation. 'The railroads do their own dispatching. Arguably they have the greatest incentive of anyone to operate safely. But the railroad companies have to carry this stuff even if they don't want to. They have no choice because they have what is called a common carrier obligation. They are engaged in inter-state commerce.'

Rail Industry Pushes Sensors Over Brakes After Ohio Train Crash

Bloomberg (2/26, Black) reports that the train derailment that spilled toxic chemicals into a small Ohio town has revived a long-running debate about railroad safety — and some industry players think they have just the thing to resolve it. The Feb. 3 crash of the Norfolk Southern Corp. train in East Palestine, Ohio, has renewed a push for railroads to adopt electronic brakes that could help prevent a malfunctioning train from endangering people and property. Electronically controlled pneumatic, or ECP, brakes have been touted for their capacity to bring trains to a halt in shorter distances and prevent dangerous pileups. The Biden administration has blamed industry stonewalling for blocking regulations that would have mandated use of the systems on some trains — even though it isn't clear that ECP brakes would've done much to mitigate an accident similar to the one in Ohio, and the proposed rules wouldn't have applied to the train that crashed. The railroad industry has found itself in a tight spot as

the political furor around the accident grows, with former President Donald Trump turning up in East Palestine, and the derailment becoming a talking point on cable news and Capitol Hill. The episode has aggravated fears about the safety of sending chemicals and other hazardous materials over the rails, and raised the specter of new regulation at a time when railroads are coping with restive workers and annoyed customers.

Installing ECP brakes that the Biden administration and safety advocates favor would be expensive and cumbersome for a business beset by complaints about delays and lackluster service. The brakes need to be installed on each car to work properly — a daunting prospect for an industry with some 1.5 million cars on the tracks and little idle capacity. A coalition that includes railcar makers, shippers and two large railroads say they have a different idea. They want to place sensors on railcars that could flag faulty equipment immediately to a train's crew and others monitoring remotely. The system is being tested on 400 railcars and could be available commercially by the end of this year, according to the group, which calls itself RailPulse. Such sensors could potentially catch problems like the overheated wheel bearing that likely caused the East Palestine wreck. Electronically controlled brakes, on the other hand, may not have even done much to mitigate the derailment if they were installed, based on a 2017 study by the National Academy of Sciences. Notably, a sensor apparatus also would likely be much less expensive for the industry to put into place. RailPulse says its system would cost about \$400 to \$900 per railcar.

Union Pacific Plans to Name New CEO This Year

Wall Street Journal (2/26, Chung, Thomas) reports that Union Pacific said Sunday it plans to name a new chief executive this year, hours after a major shareholder publicly urged the railroad company's board to oust Lance Fritz from the job. Soroban Capital Partners, a New York hedge fund managing about \$10 billion, on Sunday disclosed a letter it wrote to Union Pacific directors pushing for the change, arguing that the company has underperformed on Mr. Fritz's watch. The letter was earlier reported on by The Wall Street Journal. Union Pacific said in a statement that its board is focused on finding "highly-qualified candidates both within the industry and adjacent industries." Among its considerations are a track record of success in safety and operational matters, the company said, crediting Mr. Fritz with achieving financial growth in difficult conditions. Soroban argues that Union Pacific, the largest freight-railroad operator in the U.S. with a market capitalization of nearly \$120 billion, had ranked worst in key operating metrics including safety, volume growth and total shareholder return during Mr. Fritz's eight-year tenure, despite the strength of its network. The Omaha, Neb., railroad's returns to shareholders, including dividends, are the worst on a percentage basis among so-called Class 1 freight railroad operators in that period, according to FactSet. "We want UNP to prosper," Soroban founder Eric Mandelblatt wrote. "Unlike typical shareholder engagements which come with numerous demands, Soroban has only one ask: install new leadership who can get the trains to operate safely and on time." Soroban is a longtime Union Pacific investor, one of the company's biggest shareholders with a 1%-plus stake valued at about \$1.6 billion. Union Pacific said it decided to disclose its expected timing for the leadership change after Soroban advised the company recently that it intended to make its concerns public.

The railroad operator said it first engaged with an outside consultant and formed a task force among its directors last year to help identify successors for Mr. Fritz, 60 years old, following conversations between him and the board. Soroban is pushing for railroad veteran Jim Vena, 64, Union Pacific's chief operating officer from 2019 to 2020, to take the top post. Soroban believes the company's stock price could double in two years under Mr. Vena, given his operational experience in the industry, said the letter. Mr. Vena said he would be open to a conversation with Union Pacific about taking the CEO role and expressed admiration for the company. "Union Pacific has a chance to be the best in the industry,"

he said. Soroban's letter said the fund for years, including most recently in August, had privately expressed its unhappiness with the company's performance. Soroban has told the board that quick action must be taken so that Union Pacific can take advantage of trends the investor believes are converging to benefit railroads, including renewed investment in domestic manufacturing and efforts to reduce carbon emissions. Soroban is "completely committed to seeing that these changes be expeditiously implemented," the letter said. AP (2/26, Funk), Reuters (2/26) and Freight Waves (2/26, Marsh) provide additional coverage.

Railroad Deregulation Carries Steep Cost for Cities Like East Palestine

An editorial from St. Louis's Post-Dispatch (2/26) argues that three weeks after the toxic train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, which forced evacuations and widespread chemical contamination, the Environmental Protection Agency has ordered Norfolk Southern Railroad to conduct the cleanup and pay for the damages. Since the accident was Norfolk Southern's fault, and it was solely responsible for the toxic dangers affecting East Palestine, the EPA order seemed more like a Captain Obvious declaration. But the railroad actually had been hoping it could do the work on a voluntary basis, on its own timetable and by its own rules and cost structures. In other words, keep government out of it. The nation's railroads have, for decades, pushed hard to loosen government controls so they can move cargo with fewer restrictions and minimize costly safeguards — which is precisely why East Palestine residents now face a long-term crisis. Railroad deregulation comes at a potentially steep price to communities across the country, including St. Louis, that just want to be kept informed so they can prepare in case disaster strikes. Gov. Mike DeWine of Ohio might be the newest Republican to recognize that his party's constant push for government deregulation, while great for corporate profits, is a lousy deal for everyone else. DeWine told reporters on Feb. 14 that the railroad company was not legally required to alert anyone in Ohio about the toxic cargo because only some of the cars were carrying hazardous materials. "Frankly, if this is true, and I'm told it's true, this is absurd," DeWine said. "Congress needs to take a look at how these things are handled." Since the 1980s, the nation's railroads have championed deregulation to reverse a slump that saw rail systems fall into disrepair and derailments skyrocket. Consolidation of ownership and new investment helped them climb back to profitability. But a major drawback, as DeWine pointed out, is that the communities through which rail lines pass rarely have a clue about the rail-car contents in their midst.

New York: Full LIRR Service at New Grand Central Madison Starts Monday

WABC (2/26, Siff) reports that Grand Central Madison officially kicks off its full LIRR service schedule on Monday -- this after the greatly anticipated new transportation hub starting off with a limited LIRR run that stretched a few weeks. The LIRR begins full service from Long Island to Grand Central after debuting limited shuttle service for a few weeks. The \$11 billion project is a month overdue, and comes more than a decade after the originally conceived schedule. The MTA initially said that for the first few weeks, LIRR will operate a limited shuttle service from Jamaica to Grand Central Terminal in order to help riders get familiar with the terminal, which had originally been slated to open in 2022. WCBS (2/26, Reid, Fan) and WABC (2/26) provide additional coverage.

West Virginia: Bill Would Allow PSC Inquiries into Railroad Management, Penalties Included

Herald-Dispatch (2/26, Tony) reports that the West Virginia House of Delegates has passed a bill that would allow for Public Service Commission inquiries into how railroads are managed, with new civil penalties for railroad operators committing safety and operational violations. House Bill 3059 advanced to the Senate in an 89-3 vote Saturday, a day after the House added different penalty provisions from those removed by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. In a floor speech prior to the vote, Delegate Charlie Reynolds, R-Marshall, the bill's lead sponsor and a railroad terminal manager, said the bill was a response to trains blocking crossings and not moving for weeks while carrying coal

and gas. Reynolds argued a vote for HB 3059 was a vote to help protect West Virginia against an accident like a Feb. 3 derailment of a train carrying hazardous chemicals in East Palestine, Ohio, that has raised deep environmental health concerns in the Upper Ohio Valley. "I ask for you all to consider voting for this bill so we can keep our railroads safe," Reynolds said. HB 3059 would require the PSC to "inquire into" any violation of state law by a railroad doing business in West Virginia, empowering the commission to review the "books and papers" of a railroad, including by order or subpoena. Under HB 3059, the PSC could fine a railroad operator \$100 to \$1,000 for each violation, in addition to any other costs or expenses for which the operator is responsible. HB 3059 would allow broadband service providers and utilities to cross a railroad company's tracks, bridges, facilities, rights-of-way or easements by paying a standard crossing fee.

Maine: What's Inside Maine Freight Trains? Public Can Only Hazard a Guess

Port and Press Herald (2/26, Gray) reports that as cleanup continues from a freight train that derailed Feb. 3 in Ohio, spilling toxic chemicals and forcing locals to evacuate their homes, an exemption in Maine's public record law prevents residents from learning what hazardous materials are moving through their own communities. Freight traffic has increased in Maine in recent years as two major railroads have acquired smaller ones. The trend is likely to continue as those companies and state officials have committed tens of millions of dollars to infrastructure upgrades. General industry data shows that freight trains in Maine are mostly transporting pulp and paper, but also commonly move petroleum products and chemicals. Industry officials say they will provide annual reports about hazardous materials to emergency response agencies upon request. In 2015, just two years after a runaway oil train crashed and killed 47 people in nearby Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, the Maine Legislature decided to shield those reports from public review by exempting them from the state's Freedom of Access Act. Railroad representatives say that protection is needed for security reasons. "Railroads provide thorough information to those who need to know," Ted Greener, assistant vice president of public affairs for the Association of American Railroads, wrote in an email. "This is no accident. Safety is critical, and arming every American with the precise location and contents of every train would pose monumental safety hazards." A spokesperson for the Federal Railroad Administration reported 20 derailments in Maine between 2017 and November 2022, the most recent data available. Thirteen involved trains that were transporting hazmat, but the reports available Friday afternoon did not provide more detail about that cargo. None caused evacuations or fatalities.

North Carolina: Norfolk Southern Train Derails in Lexington ... No Hazmat, No Anger

Carolina Coast Online (2/26) reports that another Norfolk Southern train has derailed in North Carolina, but the company says there were no hazardous materials aboard ... and that there's no danger to the public this time. One of the freight train's 132 cars fell off the tracks Saturday morning near Lexington, which affected a few Amtrak trains' paths near Greensboro/surrounding areas. The announcement from one Amtrak train went out around 9:20 am, but the path was partially clear again about an hour later ... so it sounds like a cleanup crew was able to get out there quickly. Norfolk Southern confirmed it was, in fact, one of their freights that had toppled over, telling FOX News ... "There are no reports of a hazmat situation or danger to the public. Our crew is safe and additional personnel are on their way to begin cleanup. We appreciate the public's patience and care near this area during the cleanup work."

Nebraska: Train Car Catches Fire West of Cozad

KNOP (2/26, Mason) reports that in the latest development in a string of rail incidents in Dawson County, a Union Pacific rail car caught fire on Saturday west of Cozad. Upon emergency response's arrival there were flames coming out of the top of the car. Dawson County Sheriff's Office, Cozad Volunteer Fire Department, Cozad Police Department, Dawson County Emergency Management, Union

Pacific Haz-Mat, and Union Pacific Police responded to the scene at 12:30 p.m. Dawson County Emergency Manager Brian Woldt said a passerby on the south side of the railroad track reported the fire and that Union Pacific personnel inspected the car and found no leaks or damage. The train was stopped on the tracks waiting for clearance to head to North Platte. The scene was cleared at 3:30 p.m.

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Federal Transit Administration

Massachusetts: MBTA Won't Roll Out \$935M Automated Fare Payment System in 2024

Boston Herald (2/26, Cawley) reports that the MBTA does not expect to fully implement its nearly \$1 billion automated fare collection system in 2024, as previously planned, effectively pushing back a project that was already three years behind schedule. This project, when completed, will replace the 2006 CharlieCard system with a modernized contactless payment approach, allowing riders to tap or board at any door with a fare card, smartphone or credit card, with an additional aim of cutting down on fare evasion. To that end, electronic fare gates were introduced at North Station in October, and will eventually be installed at South and Back Bay stations. "The Healey-Driscoll administration has undergone a preliminary review of this complex project to assess its current status and timeline for completion," MBTA spokesperson Joe Pesaturo told the Herald on Saturday. "Based on the review so far, it's clear based on the contractor's most recent schedule, it is unlikely to meet the current 2024 timeline for full implementation. As the review process advances, more information will become available." Pesaturo did not address a Herald inquiry about whether the extended timeline would increase the cost of the project, but a source with experience in the fare payment industry said a price increase is likely. "It came out that it was \$200 million over budget, for a total cost of just under a billion," the source said. "And that's the last update we've had. I think we can all expect that there's going to be future cost overruns that are going to get this project over a billion dollars."

Brian Kane, executive director of the MBTA Advisory Board, said the board has been asking for a project update as part of its capital budget oversight process for the past couple of years, but has not been getting much of a response from the T. "It looks like they're trying to do this incrementally and not make a big deal about it, and have this be a whole big, giant program or project that's subject to systemic failure issues," Kane said. "I think they're going to incrementally phase in stuff over the next three, four or five years. And by 2026, '27, '28, you will see a wholly transformed fare collection system out there. But you won't have a giant ribbon cutting." Stacy Thompson, executive director of LivableStreets, said the contract is overly bloated and complex, making the project's "endgame" more difficult to accomplish. The MBTA should have focused on its fare policies first, she said, before implementing new fare payment technology. "The MBTA must start putting policy before technology because at the end of the day, we have a fare collection system that is off-track, is costing us a billion dollars, and we don't have low-income fares," Thompson said. "We haven't figured out our fare policies in a post-COVID world. None of that work has happened. Technology will not save us." Pesaturo said the MBTA continues to review fare policy, "through the lens of equity, to deliver a project which modernizes the fare system to reflect customer payment choices, such as mobile devices and contactless credit cards."

Here's Where — and Why — Your Train Is Running Painfully Slow

Boston.com (2/26, Rosseau) reports that the MBTA is making it easier for riders to be aware of the transit system's slow zones with a new online report that shares where train speeds are restricted. The T recently released a January report detailing train speed restrictions across the system's lines. About

8.7 miles of MBTA track experienced slowdowns, which accounts for about 6.5 percent of the entire system. The transit agency said in a press release that it would start providing daily updates on the system's speed restrictions via an online dashboard to launch in March. It will provide up-to-date information on location, speed limits, and distance for each speed restriction along each subway line. Most instances of reduced speeds are due to track work, according to the T's report, but other reasons include power or signal defects, structural issues, construction work, vehicle problems, and extreme weather conditions. The MBTA is now the second big transit agency in the nation to release its slow zone data, according to a Boston Globe report. The Chicago Transit Authority has been sharing its reduced speed information since 2005. The speed restriction dashboard is part of the T's new online safety dashboard, released Friday, which keeps the public updated on the status of the T's progress in responding to the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Safety Management Inspection (SMI) Special Directives. "MBTA management recognizes the important role the T plays in the daily lives of the communities served, that service is critical, and with this dashboard, the MBTA will be transparent about efforts underway to address the FTA findings," said Transportation Secretary and CEO Gina Fiandaca. The safety dashboard shows that the T is about 36 percent finished with its required FTA work.

Colorado: RTD Makes Critical Changes to Union Station Bus Depot After Long List of Complaints: "That Was a Very Traumatic Experience"

KCNC (2/26, Young) reports that during the pandemic, the Union Station's underground bus depot saw fewer travelers commuting to work and more unhoused people seeking shelter. RTD says as those demographics changed, crime and drug use increased. "I would definitely not walk here during the night," said nearby resident Alina Ruban, "I kinda like started feeling not safe on the street, especially Union Station." Recently, while walking to work, a man shouted at Ruban and threw a bike tire at her. "That was a very traumatic experience," Ruban said. Ever since that incident, she's been driving to work. "What we discovered was that people were using this space who weren't necessarily using public transit," said RTD's CEO Debra Johnson. She says criminal activity increased during the pandemic when commuter foot traffic decreased with people working from home. "People were utilizing illegal substances in our public restrooms, so that was the catalyst that precipitated some of these changes." After testing and finding trace amounts of fentanyl in the bus depot bathroom, RTD added a bathroom attendant and fixed posts for police. In the last year, they've also modified the bus depot entry and exits and made other environmental changes to prevent crime. "Greater illumination," Johnson said. "Cutting off access to the stairwells only for emergencies." Johnson says they've contracted a mental health clinician and unhoused coordinator to connect people who may not have anywhere else to go with help. "It's not a crime to be unhoused," she said. RTD is also working with the city and county of Denver social services. The station hopes the changes will make the surrounding area safer, but for now, neighbors like Ruban are still cautious. "I feel like it's a little bit less right now, I won't say it's a huge difference," Ruban said. More changes are still on the way. RTD may soon require proof of fare to access the bus depot area and is currently in the process of designing fare media.

Arkansas: Rock Region Metro Transit System Boss Awaits First Electric Buses

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette (2/26, Eichkorn) reports that in his eight months as head of the Rock Region Metro transit system, Justin Avery has expanded three permanent micro-transit services in Little Rock and North Little Rock. In October, he launched the first public transit service in Conway and it was "wildly successful." Now, he looks forward to the arrival of the system's first electric buses. Ultimately, Avery's vision for Rock Region Metro is to provide multiple mobility solutions to residents so they can conveniently live without a car. "I envision a future where more residents choose public transportation because it's easy to use," he said. "It's more convenient, it's more efficient, it's better for the environment. I envision a future where employers choose to invest in our community because we offer

multiple solutions for their employees to get to work." The agency is facing a few challenges like every other in the industry with hiring Certified Driver's Licensed operators. Also, a new "R.I.D.E. 2020" plan was set back, Avery said. R.I.D.E. 2020 -- or Route Innovation, Development and Evaluation -- was the name for the agency's 2019-2020 comprehensive operational analysis project to see how the public transit agency could better serve the area's needs and gain ridership. The analysis re-imagined the fixed route network -- which had not undergone a major change in 33 years at the time of the project's launch.

Nicole Hart, Rock Region's board chairperson, said Avery has "come in and exceeded our expectations." One way he has done so was to engage with the Arkansas Deaf-Blind Community organization to help the disabled understand the microtransit process. "That's probably been my greatest enjoyment," Hart said, "seeing him get down in the weeds and work and make sure ... that they understand the process and how to use it, and making sure that they're good. Sometimes CEOs have to operate at such a high level, so to see him being able to operate at a higher level but also being on the ground level to really talk to people and help them understand how to navigate the systems that we create." Becca Green, director of public engagement for Rock Region Metro, said she likes how Avery takes a "critical thinking approach" to every situation. A project the two are currently working on is to expand the micro-transit system to North Little Rock's Rose City zone. Green explained that the agency is working through logistics, as there are supply chain issues still present from the pandemic for smaller vehicles. Jacksonville, Sherwood and other Little Rock suburbs have new mayoral leadership that the transit agency is meeting with to see how microtransit could be brought in, Green also said.

Connecticut: Attacks Are a Threat to CT Mass Transit Workers – and the Entire System

An opinion piece in *CT Mirror* (2/26, Cameron) argues that since 2019, the overall rate of violent crimes — murder, rape, felony assault and robbery — has more than doubled in the NYC subways even as ridership has decreased. And increasingly it's not just passengers but the people who run our trains, subways and buses who are the targets. In NYC anyone convicted of assaulting a transit worker faces up to seven years in jail ... assuming the perp is caught and the DA prosecutes. In Connecticut such attacks are a Class C Felony, the same as assaulting a police officer. Not every attack or threat is potentially lethal. Sometimes transit workers have had coffee tossed at them or they're spat at. Whatever anger commuters may have about delays should not be taken out on the front-line workers who are doing their best under difficult circumstances. According to police, many of these attacks in Connecticut seem to be perpetrated by homeless passengers riding the bus system all day taking advantage of the free fare program which expires at the end of March. Lacking sufficient shelters and day-facilities it seems they prefer our buses to camping out in other public places. Many of them are suffering from mental health issues. They need our governments' help, not a change of venue. Keeping them out of sight and off our streets by having them ride our buses is not the answer. Their presence on our buses and subways frightens other passengers, further discouraging badly needed ridership. And transit workers who must cope with them are not social workers, so it's not fair to ask them to intercede. The fear of confrontations with angry or unstable passengers is one of the reasons MTA did so little to enforce the federal face-mask rules during the pandemic. The free fare program on Connecticut buses has been immensely helpful to poor people struggling to save money. They deserve those breaks... but not when the unintended consequences of such a pilot program leads to violence. Mass transit is replete with security cameras and, in the case of vulnerable bus drivers, safety shields around their driving work area. So the people making these attacks are usually caught — but only after the damage, physical and psychological, has been inflicted. The answer is not to put armed guards on every bus and train. That's impractical. But whether attackers are mentally unstable or just drunk, whether their targets are transit workers or random passengers, something must be done to keep such people off of

mass transit.

California: In Near Future, Golden Gate Transit Facing Harder Decisions Than Just Raising Fares

An editorial from Marin Independent Journal (2/26) argues that Golden Gate Transit is facing a challenge, one that is not that unique for public transit as the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic wanes. Ridership is still lagging from pre-lockdown numbers that sent farebox revenue plummeting. For Golden Gate, bus ridership is down about 55% from pre-pandemic numbers. The ferries have nearly recovered. For Golden Gate, the financial challenge is compounded by the fiscal fact that toll revenue from Golden Gate Bridge crossings is lagging, by about \$1 million per week. Half of those tolls go to subsidize bus and ferry tickets. That's why the district is considering raising rates. And even if directors vote to enact the increases advanced by district staff, the district will still be in a fiscal hole. The district's quandary has been made even more precarious by changes in the marketplace, from workers not having to commute as often due to shifts to online work to post-pandemic layoffs. The district is working with other Bay Area transportation agencies to explore measures, such as a baywide tax for transit, to help right their fiscal ships. Federal and state pandemic support helped transportation agencies avoid large services cuts and layoffs, but without that support and significant drops in ridership those agencies face payrolls they cannot meet without either raising fares or cutting staff. "Our biggest cost is our people, and if we're going to give pay raises to employees, if we're going to make additional contributions to their pensions, we need our revenues to do that," said Golden Gate's general manager, Denis Mulligan. It appears that is going to be difficult to achieve without cuts in expenses, especially as the proposed increases are modest and gradual. And even with the proposed incremental increase, Golden Gate's leadership needs to take a hard look at what it will mean to ridership. Trying to build ridership while you are also raising fares or reducing routes seems to be counterintuitive. Fares should be affordable, routes should be convenient and service should be reliable. That's the best recipe for building ridership. Golden Gate is facing a fiscal dilemma as it is trying to rebuild service to pre-pandemic levels, restoring routes that were eliminated or reduced during the lockdown. Golden Gate Transit provides a vital service. Its leadership needs to take a hard look at its potential for rebuilding ridership to pre-pandemic levels and how raising fares will affect that goal.

Minnesota: Metro Transit Expands On-Demand Pilot Program

Star Tribune (2/26, Harlow) reports that last fall, Metro Transit launched a one-year, on-demand ride pilot in parts of three north Minneapolis neighborhoods, and because the service has been so well-received, it's now adding all or parts of three more. Metro Transit Micro, which went live Sept. 10, will offer expanded service starting Monday. It operates much like suburban services, including SouthWest Prime, Plymouth Metrolink's Click-and-Ride, Maple Grove's My Ride and the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority's Connect. "The goal is to expand mobility choices, especially for low-income areas and communities of color," said project manager Victoria Dan. "We hope to see a boost in overall ridership and see the true potential on how well it can perform." Riders use an app or call a phone number to request a ride. A small bus similar to those used for Metro Mobility — the door-to-door service for people with disabilities unable to use traditional transit options — is sent to their location and takes them to their destination anywhere in the service zone. Micro riders pay the same fares as those taking other Metro Transit bus lines or trains: \$2 during off-peak times and \$2.50 when rush-hour fares are collected. Seniors and children ages 6 through 12 pay \$1 per ride during off-peak times. Micro riders can transfer to other bus and rail lines at no extra cost. In the five-month period that ended Jan. 31, Metro Transit Micro provided more than 6,800 rides throughout the service zone bounded by Interstate 94 to the east, Interstate 394 to the south, Theodore Wirth Parkway to the west and Golden Valley Road and West Broadway to the north. With five buses circulating throughout the 2.5-square-mile area covering the Near North, Bryn Mawr and Harrison neighborhoods, wait times have been

short, adding to the service's growing popularity, Dan said. The average time from request to pickup has been about 6 minutes, she said. Community feedback and interest from North Side organizations led to expanding into the Willard-Hay, Jordan and Hawthorne neighborhoods, Dan said. The borders for the ride zone in the south and west will remain unchanged but will expand to 34th Avenue on the north end and to the area along the Mississippi River north of Broadway on the east end. "We have existing resources to serve even more trips," Dan said. "We hope people will use the service to connect to the fixed route network."

Virginia: Attacks on Public Transit Drivers Could Become Crimes After New Bill Passes Virginia House

WR C (2/26, Murray) reports that it may become a crime to attack a bus driver in the state of Virginia, thanks to a new bill that passed in the House of Delegates this week. On Friday, Feb. 24, the Virginia House of Delegates voted to pass House Bill 2330. Under this bill, physically assaulting a public transit operator would become a Class 1 misdemeanor. Anyone who does so could serve no more than 12 months in jail, or pay a fine of no more than \$2,500. This bill would make public transit operators a protected class in Virginia, alongside health care providers, teachers and first responders. According to Del. Delores L. McQuinn, she introduced the bill in January after hearing concerning stories about public transit operators being assaulted. Such assaults have been especially prevalent in Richmond, with several recent acts of violence against Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC) drivers. House Bill 2330 will now go to the Senate, where its future is uncertain. McQuinn noted in January that the bill might face opposition in the Senate, since she said that state senators have taken issue with bills involving mandatory minimums in the past.

Maryland: Metro Tests Emergency Response at Wheaton Station

NBC Washington (2/26, Ward) reports that Metro held an emergency response drill at the Wheaton Station in Maryland on Sunday. The Red Line station was closed between 8:45 a.m. to 2 p.m. Crews were expected to test their response to a derailment inside the tunnel between Wheaton and Forest Glen. George Nader, assistant chief of the Metro Transit Police, said the drill aimed to prepare crews for possible incidents along Metro lines. "We're prepared to either provide service, restore service or if we need to, mitigate incident with rescue efforts or whatever it is that presents to us," Nader said. Metro said once the drill is over the agency will assess what worked and what did not work to better prepare for future emergencies. Metro has recently faced several safety concerns. This includes their emergency response at stations and on trains.

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Maritime Administration

South Carolina: SC Port Agency's Labor Dispute Is on A Fast Track After Appeals Court Reverses Itself

Post and Courier (2/26, Wren) reports that It turns out the second time's a charm for the State Ports Authority. After the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals denied the SPA's initial request for an expedited hearing in a labor dispute involving the Leatherman Terminal in North Charleston, the maritime agency asked for a reconsideration. The Richmond, Va., court obviously bought the revised argument, agreeing on Feb. 23 to put the case on a fast track. Instead of a process that could drag on for years, the appeals court wants all sides to file their legal briefs and responses by May 26. The court is hearing the SPA's appeal of a National Labor Relations Board decision on Dec. 16 that states members of the International Longshoremen's Association must operate the ship-to-shore cranes at the Leatherman wharf on the old Navy base. The ruling threatens the so-called hybrid workforce model used at the Port of Charleston's other terminals, where SPA workers operate the cranes while the ILA members move cargo through the

yard.

Massachusetts: How New Bedford Businesses Can Benefit from Offshore Wind

WBSM (2/26, Philips) reports that offshore wind companies are about to spend an awful lot of money to bring their industry to the United States. This is the time for New Bedford businesses, especially minority and women-owned businesses, to line up for their share of the cash windfall. Vineyard Wind and the U.S Offshore Wind Business Network are sponsoring a free, three-day training for local business owners, so they can be a part of the supply-chain needed for offshore wind development. Erik Andrade is working with Vineyard Wind and the Offshore Wind Network. He joined Townsquare Sunday this week to get the word out. "They're going to need vessels and people to operate them, they're going to need contractors, plumbers, ship suppliers, so there's a wide array of businesses needed," Andrade said.

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National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Bloomberg Investigation: Ford's Electric Pickup Is Built From Metal That's Damaging the Amazon

Bloomberg (2/26, Prasso, Brice) reports that the new all-electric model of America's best-selling pickup truck, the Ford F-150, relies on aluminum to keep it light and give it speed. With no delay from a piston-firing combustion engine, it can bolt like a high-performance sports car from zero to 60 in 4 seconds. It emits no exhaust, makes no sound. Yet its impact can be heard a world away — in the Amazon rainforest in Brazil. That's where the Ford F-150's troubled trail of aluminum begins.

Aluminum used to frame the truck's passenger compartment can be traced back from Ford Motor Co.'s historic Rouge assembly complex in Dearborn, Michigan, to a parts manufacturer in Pennsylvania, to a smelter in Canada and, ultimately, to Brazil. There, in the heart of the Amazon, rust-colored bauxite is being clawed from a mine that has long faced allegations of pollution and land appropriation. And, near where the Amazon River empties into the Atlantic, a refinery that processes the ore stands accused of sickening thousands of people.

A class-action lawsuit on behalf of 11,000 residents of neighborhoods surrounding that refinery, Hydro Alunorte, names owner Norsk Hydro ASA of Norway as responsible for polluting their rivers and streams. The suit cites toxic mud containing elevated levels of aluminum and other heavy metals, which are byproducts of refining bauxite into alumina, the white powder that becomes aluminum. Alunorte's actions, it alleges, have caused health problems such as cancer, hair loss, neurological dysfunction, birth defects and increased mortality. "Every single day we die a little bit," says Maria do Socorro, 57, whose community group Cainquiama is the lead plaintiff and who lives in an open-air house not far from the refinery.

For consumers seeking to lower their carbon footprints, the environmental and social costs of electric vehicles may be greater than they realize. The human toll from the extraction of minerals used in batteries has been well-documented: cobalt and copper from the Democratic Republic of Congo; lithium from Chile; nickel from Indonesia. But the damage along the aluminum supply chain has been largely unexamined. It was only after Hydro and other companies announced last year that they were supplying aluminum parts for the F-150 EV that the trail back to Brazil became traceable.

Audi Could Build EVs in U.S. Thanks to Biden's Inflation Reduction Act

Car and Driver (2/26, Blanco) notes that the IRA's hits just keep on coming. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which was passed into law last August, shook up the electric-vehicle market in the U.S. One

shakeup came in the way the law encourages domestic EV production, and the latest automaker to respond is Audi, which said Friday that it is evaluating construction of a new EV factory in the U.S. "The IRA has made building a U.S. plant for electric cars very attractive," Audi CEO Markus Duesmann told the German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung. Duesmann said if Audi does build EVs here, it would probably be at a joint plant with the Volkswagen Group, according to Reuters. The Washington Post quotes Duesmann as saying, "Decisions have not yet been made, but the VW Group will probably make more cars over there [in the U.S.] in the future for the U.S. market." While Volkswagen has a plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee, Audi does not currently have any plants in the U.S., and the automaker's e-tron EVs are built in Brussels, Belgium.

Paccar Recalls Medium-Duty Trucks for Sudden Brake Failures

FreightWaves (2/26, Adler) reports that Paccar Inc. is recalling six models of Kenworth and Peterbilt medium-duty trucks over four model years for possible sudden brake failure that could lead to a crash. Certain 2021-2024 Kenworth T280, T380 and T480 and Peterbilt 536, 537 and 548 vehicles make up the list of trucks recalled. The pedal plunger connecting the brake pedal to the brake valve may disconnect when the brake pedal is fully applied and then released rapidly. Brake failure could result. the pedal plunger that connects the brake pedal to the brake valve may become disconnected, causing brake failure. The recall began with a Bendix Commercial Vehicle Systems recall of 10,425 brake parts. Bendix sold those only to Kenworth, according to its recall filing. Kenworth and Peterbilt medium-duty trucks are substantially similar mechanically. The difference between the populations of the Paccar recall and the Bendix equipment recall was unclear. It may involve aftermarket parts.

Arizona: 2 Killed, 11 Injured After Pickup Truck Crashes into Group of Bicyclists

NBC News (2/26, Burke, McShane) reports that police arrested a man after he allegedly crashed a pickup truck into a group of bicyclists Saturday in Goodyear, Arizona, leaving two dead and 11 hospitalized with injuries. The crash happened just before 8 a.m. as a large group was riding on Cotton Lane Bridge, police said in a news release. The driver of the truck remained at the scene. It remains unclear what caused the crash.

Missouri: Four Killed, Four Critically Injured in Vehicle Crash Early Sunday at South Grand Boulevard and Forest Park Avenue

St. Louis Post Dispatch (2/26, Schremp Hahn) reports that four people are dead and four others critically injured after a car ran a red light and crashed into their SUV, which caused it to drive over an overpass and land on its roof at South Grand Boulevard and Forest Park Avenue early Sunday morning. The driver of the car that caused the crash left the scene. The SUV carried a total of eight people; four were taken to hospitals and four were killed. The incident happened around 1:30 a.m. The crash caused the Impala to go west on the Forest Park entrance ramp and come to a stop. The Tahoe went through the bridge guardrail, falling to the street below, where it landed below on its roof in the westbound lanes of Forest Park.

Electric Car Companies: Automakers Finding Success with Electric Vehicles

NewsNation (2/26) notes that after years of low-level simmering, the electric car's presence in the automotive industry is set to boil over. Both traditional and electric car manufacturers are rapidly expanding their EV model lines, widening consumers' electric car choices while powering an ever-rising market share for EVs. All this activity, even in the face of rising inflation, supply chain challenges, and volatile lithium prices, confirms the electric car is here to stay. Back in the first quarter of 2021 EVs made up 2.7 percent of the car market. That figure grew to 4.2 percent by the end of 2021, and to 6.4 percent by the end of 2022. This increase in electric vehicle share comes from rising sales across the country, not just in states like California and New York, but throughout North America. A recent iSeeCars study saw electric vehicle sales growing the fastest in states like Mississippi, Hawaii, Utah,

Maryland, and Wyoming.

Tesla's Built-In Dashcam Crash Footage Proves Pickup Driver Lied

Inside EVs (2/26, Loveday) reports that a Tesla Model 3 owner was driving himself and his son in Napa, California, when a pickup truck driver hit them. The crash damaged some of the car's cameras, and the camera that captured the incident is an Autopilot camera that isn't typically used for the TeslaCam feature. This means the Model 3 owner had to request footage of the crash from Tesla. Tesla sent him the footage, which proved the truck driver had lied to the police.

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Pipeline & Hazardous Materials Safety Administration

Ohio: Contaminated Waste Shipments from Ohio Derailment to Resume

Washington Post (2/26, Brasch) reports that following a one-day pause for federal authorities to take over operations, officials announced Sunday they can continue removing contaminated waste from the site of the toxic train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio — a city with residents eager for this nightmare to be over. Since the train derailed three weeks ago, Norfolk Southern has handled the disposal of contaminated materials. That changed Friday when the Environmental Protection Agency paused shipments to ensure all the sites receiving waste were certified by the EPA and that travel routes adhered to federal law, said Debra Shore, the EPA's regional administrator. "We owe it to East Palestine and residents nearby to move waste out of the community as quickly as possible," Shore said at a Sunday news conference. She said liquid waste is destined for a site about 130 miles west in Vickery, Ohio, where it will be disposed of in an underground injection well. She said Norfolk Southern will move solid waste about 15 miles south of East Palestine to an incinerator in East Liverpool, Ohio. Authorities need to find operations that can handle the waste, and they have already been turned away from two facilities. About 280 tons, or 20 truckloads, of solid waste had already been hauled away from the derailment site as of Saturday, according to an update from the office of Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine (R). Although 15 truckloads of contaminated soil had already been taken to a treatment and disposal facility in Michigan, the other five truckloads were returned to East Palestine. A facility in Texas accepted an unspecified amount of liquid waste, but DeWine's office said that site will not be accepting any more.

As of Saturday, about 102,000 gallons of liquid waste and 4,500 cubic yards of solid waste were being stored at the site in East Palestine, not including the five truckloads returned to the village, according to the update from DeWine's office. The cleanup process is only creating more solid and liquid waste that will require disposal sites. "Everyone wants this contamination gone from the community," Shore said Saturday. "They don't want the worry, and they don't want the smell." Anne Vogel, director of the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, said Saturday that dirt and liquid was being hauled from the site, crews were using aeration techniques and pumps to clean waterways, and authorities were monitoring wells near the municipal well field. "We will be able for years to come to know if there are any contaminants approaching the municipal well field," she said. Vogel said Sunday that workers had removed all the rail cars, except for the ones being held by the National Transportation Safety Board for its investigation. She said the cars' removal allows crews to access more soil and install monitoring wells at the derailment site. "We're here; we're not going anywhere," she said. Officials at the news conference Sunday said monitoring tests are not showing that there are any unsafe levels of toxic chemicals in the area. Still, journalists peppered leaders with questions at the news conference about residents' reports that they and their animals had suddenly fallen ill. "We understand residents have a lot of questions," said Thomas C. Sivak, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's regional administrator. "... Every disaster is different, and we want to hear from the impacted residents." AP (2/26), Bloomberg (2/26, Gillum), CNN (2/26, Salahieh, Moshtaghian), Fox News (2/26, Hagstrom) and

Los Angeles Times (2/26, Asiedu) provide additional coverage.

A PPP Plan for East Palestine

An opinion piece in Washington Post (2/26, Vance) argues that East Palestine is a small town of about 5,000 in the northeast area of Ohio along the state border with Pennsylvania. Its median income is \$44,498, and 71 percent of its voters supported Donald Trump in 2020. Like many towns near Youngstown, Ohio, it has suffered substantially from the wave of deindustrialization that saw millions of jobs leave for China, Mexico and other countries. Because of this, the concerns of residents have focused on economic development questions over the past several years. How do they lure back industry? How do they support the town's small businesses? How do they persuade some of their young people to return home after college or military service lures them away? How do they provide good jobs to those who never left at all? Every one of those challenges has gotten much more difficult. The catastrophic Norfolk Southern train crash this month, which led to the spilling and burn-off of highly toxic chemicals, has forced residents of East Palestine (pronounced "palace-teen") to ask altogether different questions. Given the chemical release, is the air breathable? Is the water drinkable? Can I still raise a family here? Will our small town survive? The public safety concerns take precedence.

So far, air and water tests performed by the Environmental Protection Agency, Norfolk Southern and local officials have been encouraging. Most people I've spoken to are highly skeptical of both the train company and the federal EPA, but they are heartened by the fact that their friends and neighbors are testing the water, too. While many drink the city water, much of the surrounding area's residents rely on private wells. These folks will need consistent, timely testing for months or even years, and so far many have been frustrated by the wait times necessary to get their well water tested. The lack of public trust means that many of East Palestine's residents will continue to doubt that their community is safe. We cannot just order them to believe the same public health authorities who — in their view, at least — bungled the response to the covid-19 pandemic. Even if air and water tests show little acute risk of exposure, residents want to know what could happen to those who breathe that air and drink that water for years. Indeed, chronic exposure to vinyl chloride and other chemicals present on the derailed train may be the most pressing public health issue facing East Palestine. And our public health and environmental authorities are, by their own admission, not well equipped to monitor and address chronic exposure.

But East Palestine has a longer-term perception problem, too. Residents must rebuild an already stressed local economy, in a media environment where every story about the health concerns of residents drives people and capital away from their town. I spoke to one young couple who own a successful dog breeding and training business. The day after the train crash, four of their dogs began vomiting. They moved their dogs to a relative's home far away and don't plan to return. Another woman told me she's not worried about drinking the water herself, but she is worried what a decade of drinking that water will do to her grandchildren. She hopes to leave town as soon as she can. A local farmer who raises chickens and hay on her property put the matter bluntly: "Do you think anyone wants animal feed from a farm in East Palestine? Do you think anyone wants eggs from me?" Unfortunately, she has a point. No matter how much independent testing shows the worst of the environmental catastrophe is behind us, East Palestine will be dealing with bad perception, and its economic consequences, for years.

The mayor, a good man with an impossible job, told me that about half of his constituents are terrified and half of them just want the media circus to go home so they can get to work rebuilding the community they love. We can help, not just tomorrow but months from now. East Palestine needs long-

term investment, from both the federal government and Norfolk Southern Railway. Without special refinancing, homeowners will be underwater as flight from the community drives home prices lower, decimating the tax base on which local schools and public services rely. Farms will require direct support. Underfunded schools will need help. East Palestine will need its own version of the Paycheck Protection Program to protect workers and businesses who lost their livelihoods because of the decisions of others. Otherwise, an entire town of good people will suffer mightily through no fault of their own. WBNS (2/26, Bornancin) highlights a honey farmer in East Palestine who is worried about how the after math of the derailment will affect his business.

Railroad Hazmat Incidents Decline but Carry Massive Financial Impacts

NBC (2/26, Chinni) notes that the train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, brought attention to the dangers of transporting toxic chemicals by rail. The black clouds of smoke that rose over the community of 5,000 people and the chemicals that spilled out of the train left many wondering how often such events occur and what would happen if they occurred in more populous areas. Just how safe is shipping toxic cargo by rail? The answer is somewhat complicated. To start with, train derailments aren't uncommon. Over the past three years, there's been an average of about three a day in the U.S. The number of derailments has essentially remained flat for the past few years. There were 1,049. There were 1,093 in 2021 and about 1,100 in 2020, according to the Federal Railroad Administration. But over the longer term, the last decade, the number has declined. Of course, not all train derailments are the same. Not all trains carry carloads of dangerous cargo and chemicals. Looking more closely at railway incidents involving hazardous materials, there seems to be good news. The figures are much lower, and they show a decline over the last decade. Since 2013, railway hazmat incidents have declined sharply, from more than 700 in 2014 to 355 in 2022 in a 51% drop, according to the Transportation Department. To be clear, any hazmat release is bad news, but the decline is substantial. It suggests, again, that moving such chemicals by rail is getting safer.

Like it or not, hazardous materials need to be shipped around the country one way or another. A look at the other most common way they are moved — by truck — seems to suggest trains offer a safety advantage. Consider a comparison of truck and rail hazmat incidents since 2013. Even the peak of train hazmat incidents in the last decade — 718 spills in 2014 — is tiny compared to the number of releases associated with trucks in any year in the last decade. And, perhaps more concerning, the number of hazmat incidents involving trucks is on the rise — from a low of 13,888 to more than 23,000 last year — an increase of 67%. Some dangerous chemicals will always be transported by truck, even if it's just for the "last mile" of delivery. Trains don't run everywhere, after all. But the data seems to suggest that keeping hazardous materials off the road and on train tracks may be the safest bet. There's another point to consider, however: the scale of such releases. While a lot of trucks might be carrying dangerous materials, they carry less. A single train derailment, like the one in East Palestine on Feb. 3, can cause a lot of damage. That complicates the picture quite a bit, and you can see the impact in the data. There were 23,178 highway hazmat incidents in 2022, causing \$21.3 million in damage. The 355 railway spills were much more significant, producing more than \$45 million in damage.

Nevada: Toxic Train Wreck in Ohio Hits Close to Home in Nevada

An opinion piece in Nevada Independent (2/26, Smith) argues that in Nevada, those who have devoted decades to the fight against the Department of Energy's proposed nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain viewed the Ohio derailment through a different lens. The recent toxic event was the sort of accident they had feared might happen during the transportation of high-level radioactive material across the country had the dump project moved forward. "Groups across the country, the people who think about nuclear waste are really worked up about [the recent derailment]," longtime Yucca Mountain opponent Judy Treichel says. "The email is just rocketing back and forth." With the project's

regulatory licensing process suspended for more than a decade, some are surely tempted to wonder what all the fuss is about. It is annually pronounced dead by its political critics from Nevada, who pledge vigilance from Carson City to Washington, D.C. Whether you believe it's safely in the history books or one of the federal government's undead programs that slumber uneasily until the climate in Washington changes, it's important to appreciate that the project has always been as much of a political question as a scientific one. Although countless articles have been written about the politics and science surrounding the site, it was the dangerous specter of the transportation issue that I believe has proven an unbeatable argument against Yucca's proponents. Taking nothing from the best efforts of the Silver State's elected officials, politically speaking, screwing Nevada was the easy part. Simply put, the real dangers of transporting nuclear waste crossed state lines and rumbled past the front doors of millions of Americans.

Longtime anti-Yucca opponent Steve Frishman reminds me of the logistical nightmare that some clever critics referred to as the "mobile Chernobyl." Tons of radioactive waste collected from 35 locations would have to pass through 43 states traveling within a half mile of 50 million people before reaching the gates of Yucca Mountain. While serving as the head of Nevada's Commission on Nuclear Projects, former Gov. Grant Sawyer's roadshow about the dangers of transporting radioactive waste left a powerful impression on citizens far outside arid Nevada. Frishman says that's one reason why the Department of Energy fought to prevent federal funds from being used by Nevada to build what they called "interstate coalitions." But states began linking arms just the same out of a sense of common concern. Treichel says, "Transportation was one thing that the Department of Energy didn't want to talk about at all. They pretty much wanted to stick with other topics." And when the safety of rail transportation was questioned, she recalls, the response deflected to the use of "dedicated trains so you don't have to worry about something like that. In fact, that's almost impossible to do with the national railway system we have."

Ohio: Ohio Among Worst in Nation for Train Accidents and Hazardous Material Spills, Our Investigation Finds

Springfield News-Sun (2/26, Hulsey via Yahoo News) reports that Ohio is third worst in the nation for serious incidents involving the release of hazardous materials being transported by rail, road or air, and after the fire and toxic releases caused by the derailment of a Norfolk Southern train in East Palestine, calls are growing for more regulation and efforts to protect people and communities. "Current rules for high-hazard trains were made for large shipments of crude oil, but those rules didn't protect East Palestine and we need to fix that," said U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio. "We need to work with DOT (U.S. Department of Transportation) to create new rules for shipping hazardous materials to keep our communities safe. More inspections, better braking and other safeguards should all be on the table. We can't let lobbyists stand in the way." Norfolk Southern, CSX Transportation Inc. and several smaller railroads travel through the Dayton and southwest Ohio region. A 2022 high-hazard flammable train (HHFT) study that included Montgomery County listed more than 500 materials carried by trains that are hazard rated, said Deb Decker, the county director of communications. "There was an average of 1.4 high-hazard flammable trains per week running through Montgomery County," she said. "The highest count for one week was seven HHFTs." The study will help the county identify the hazards that most frequently travel through the Dayton region and better tailor the region's response plans and training, said Jeff Jordan, director of Montgomery County Emergency Management.

Frustrated Cuyahoga County Officials Want Norfolk Southern, CSX to Be More Open About Hazardous Cargo Passing Through Greater Cleveland

Cleveland Plain Dealer (2/26, Krouse) reports that local officials in Greater Cleveland worry about the

volume of hazardous materials being transported along rail lines through the area and are concerned that the industry isn't doing enough to limit the potential for disaster. The catastrophic derailment of a Norfolk Southern train earlier this month created an environmental mess in rural East Palestine, Ohio, but the thought on a lot of minds is what if such an event happened in a more densely populated area like Cuyahoga County, home to more than 1.2 million people.

Illinois: A Battle Simmers in Illinois Over Plans to Pipe in and Store Millions of Tons of Planet-Warming Carbon Dioxide Underground

Chicago Tribune (2/26, Schoenberg) reports that the fight over carbon dioxide — what to do with it and where to store it — is ramping up in Illinois. The Prairie Research Institute at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign recently released a report showing that Illinois is well-positioned to become a leader in carbon capture, utilization and storage, in which planet-warming carbon dioxide is removed from industrial exhaust or the air and either used or injected into rock deep underground. Carbon capture has been around for decades in the fossil fuel industry, which uses CO₂ to extract hard-to-reach oil. But recently companies have begun proposing to build major carbon dioxide pipelines in Illinois in the name of decarbonization, or reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The Navigator CO₂ project would transport liquid carbon dioxide from ethanol and fertilizer plants in South Dakota, Minnesota, Nebraska, Iowa and Illinois to underground storage sites in central Illinois. Another project, proposed by Chicago-based Archer Daniels Midland Co. in partnership with a Denver company, would take carbon captured at ADM's facilities in Clinton and Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and transport it to an existing storage site in Decatur. The opportunity to compete for billions of dollars in federal funding is on the line as Illinois considers the future of carbon capture, according to the Prairie Research Institute report, as well as the chance to create jobs and boost local economies.

And at a time when the state and federal government and nations worldwide are trying to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and stave off the worst effects of global warming — including catastrophic floods and droughts — carbon capture also holds out the promise of making the job easier. But as the fight over Navigator CO₂'s pipeline illustrates, battle lines are being drawn, with opponents questioning carbon capture's very reason for being — its real-world effectiveness in reducing greenhouse gases. There are also safety concerns. Landowners fear a pipeline could rupture, releasing a potentially suffocating gas not far from bedroom windows. "Right now, to move forward with a carbon dioxide pipeline is unconscionable," said Pam Richart, lead organizer of the Coalition to Stop CO₂ Pipelines, which includes citizens and environmental groups. "It just brings too much risk." In response to questions about the possibility of a pipeline rupture, Navigator CO₂ Vice President of Government and Public Affairs Elizabeth Burns-Thompson said that Navigator has learned from previous failures and successes in the industry. "We are using the best available information and technology to date to assure that we're building out the most state-of-the-art and safest asset that can be possible," Burns-Thompson said.

Iowa: Ethanol's Death Is Greatly Exaggerated

An opinion piece in The Gazette (2/26, Taylor) argues that a recent article in the Gazette reported on a study commissioned by the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association purporting to show that the Iowa ethanol industry would die if the proposed carbon dioxide pipelines are not constructed. A close reading of that study, however, reveals flaws in its argument. The general conclusion of the study is that if Iowa ethanol plants cannot capture carbon and pipe it to North Dakota or Illinois, ethanol plants in other states surrounding Iowa will gain an advantage at the expense of Iowa's ethanol industry. Of course, this conclusion relies on several assumptions that do not hold up under scrutiny. The first assumption is that the Iowa ethanol industry is in a precarious position financially. But that assumption is at odds with the facts. The Iowa Renewable Fuels Association recently issued a press release saying

that 2022 was the industry's best year ever financially, and that the future looks even brighter. And as the report itself says, Iowa has the best access to corn for ethanol production and significant demand for the distiller's grains for feed and for other co-products of ethanol plants. Those benefits to the industry are always going to be there. Another assumption in the study is that federal tax credits for carbon capture will be necessary to keep the ethanol industry going. There are two kinds of tax credits. 45Q credits are based on the tons of carbon captured and sequestered underground. Those are the credits the pipeline companies have been basing their arguments on. 45Z tax credits are based on a carbon intensity score for allegedly clean fuels. The ethanol with carbon dioxide removed from the manufacturing process would be sold to states like California that have clean fuel standards. The study focuses on 45Z credits, not 45Q credits, so the study is irrelevant to the Iowa pipeline proposals. An ethanol plant cannot double dip and claim both credits. It has to use one or the other. So sequestration of the carbon dioxide as planned by the proposed pipelines would qualify for 45Q credits, and would not be eligible for the 45Z credit. Since the pipelines are relying on 45Q, the study's claim that a pipeline would enable an ethanol plant to claim the 45Z credit is not based on the facts.

A third assumption in the study is that surrounding states (Illinois, Minnesota, Nebraska, and South Dakota) will permit pipelines and advantage their ethanol industries at the expense of Iowa's, if pipelines are not built in Iowa. But there is no basis for assuming pipelines will be built in those other states. In fact, there is tremendous grassroots resistance to carbon dioxide pipelines in those states. So those other states may not be willing to host a pipeline. The study is simply engaging in fearmongering. And even if pipelines were built in Iowa and more ethanol plants were built, would that benefit corn farmers? Would, or could, Iowa farmers grow more corn than they are now to supply the additional ethanol plants? Or is the carbon capture proposal just a scheme to make more money for the ethanol industry with no additional benefit to farmers? Is this another example of corporate welfare, since the tax credits are essentially taking money from taxpayers? The ethanol industry has been subsidized by the government – by us – in one way or another since at least 2005. In a free-market economy, an industry should be able to stand on its own after that many years and should not continue to depend on taxpayers. It is important to remember that the study was paid for by the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association to support the Association's argument for the carbon dioxide pipelines, so the ethanol industry can get the tax credits. I hope that Iowans, and especially the Iowa Legislature, will be skeptical of the unsupported conclusions in the report. An opinion piece in Des Moines Register (2/26, Ewoldt) provides additional coverage.

Virginia: Train Wreck Readiness Part of Downtown Roanoke Evacuation Planning

Roanoke Times (2/26, Sturgeon) reports that authorities would respond to a major train wreck or other disaster in downtown Roanoke by hustling residents and workers as much as 2 miles away from danger, according to a downtown evacuation plan now under final review before public release. Years in the making, the first-of-its-kind document is expected to be released sometime this year. It is not a response to the Feb. 3 wreck of a Norfolk Southern Corp. train in Ohio, but it figures in safety plans officials have developed for Roanoke, where the railroad also owns and operates trains on local tracks. "There is a lot of rail traffic that comes through Roanoke that has hazardous materials on it," said Trevor Shannon, battalion chief for emergency management and community preparedness at Roanoke Fire EMS. The railroad industry is generally regarded as the safest transportation option for most goods and federal data show accidents involving hazardous materials are exceedingly rare. But with rails crossing through the heart of many cities and towns nationwide, even one hazardous materials accident could be disastrous, especially in a densely populated area. Roanoke region residents and trains have coexisted for more than 170 years. Modern fire departments maintain written incident response plans covering rail, highways, airports and other settings. Agencies in the region have agreements to jointly respond to an incident in any jurisdiction and also join forces with state agencies

and private contractors. Officials relied on cooperation agreements to handle a release of chlorine gas at Bedford's sewage plant in April 2022. In another recent incident, a crashed Norfolk Southern train spilled coal into the Roanoke River west of Salem in 2020. Shannon, the emergency preparedness lead at the city fire department, had no memory of any recent rail incident in the city posing a severe threat to the public. But forces remain prepared, he said, describing the relationship between his agency and Norfolk Southern's regional point person on hazardous materials safety as "fantastic." They haven't discussed the Ohio incident yet, but they will, he said. "The big question right now is the lessons learned," Shannon said. "We certainly look for a conversation to happen on this."

Indiana: Could the East Palestine, Ohio, Rail Disaster Happen Here? About 30 Trains Have Spilled Chemicals in Region Over Last Decade

The Times of Northwest Indiana (2/26, Pete) reports that a toxic train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, sent up an ominous billowing mushroom cloud and sickened residents after hazardous chemicals were spilled, polluting the air, water and land. Freight trains carrying all kinds of chemicals rumble every day through Northwest Indiana as neighboring Chicago is home to one of the nation's largest rail hubs. "If you're wondering if the train passing by is carrying dangerous chemicals like those that spilled in East Palestine, the answer is, it is," said Jennifer Sass, senior scientist for the Natural Resources Defense Council. "Unless it says Amtrak, it is." Northwest Indiana is a massive hub of train activity, with more than 700 miles of active rail passing through the Region, including 557 miles of mainline rail, according to the Northwest Indiana Forum. The Class I railroads Norfolk Southern, Canadian National and CSX all operate in Northwest Indiana. The Calumet Region mainlines of CSX and Norfolk Southern, the railroad responsible for the Ohio derailment that spilled a stew of toxic chemicals like vinyl chloride and phosgene, are among the most heavily trafficked in the country averaging more than 100 million gross ton miles a year.

Trains in Indiana have spilled hazmat cargo 114 times since 2013, according to a database USA Today put together of federal incident reports. Thirty-three trains have spilled hazardous chemicals in Northwest Indiana over the past decade. Hazmat rail spills took place 27 times in Gary, three times in East Chicago, twice in Hammond and once in Kingsbury in rural LaPorte County. Many of the hazardous chemical spills in Indiana took place in communities with major railroad yards like Avon and Gary, which is home to the CN Kirk Yard. None of the incidents in Northwest Indiana resulted in any injuries, including from the chemical spills, according to U.S. Department of Transportation reports. The causes varied, including vapor valve leaks, overfilled tanks, failed outlet valves, corrosion, loose bolts, inadequate preparation for transportation or a tank shell puncture following a derailment in Gary a decade ago. The Federal Railroad Administration reported 1,574 train accidents last year, including 1,049 derailments. Derailments declined about 4% year-over-year and nearly 20% over the last decade, according to the federal agency. "Derailments are actually going down," Sass said. "But trains are getting longer and more dangerous, as they're carrying more hazardous materials. So while the safety record is improving, the danger from trains is increasing."

Iowa: Anti-CO2 Pipeline Bill Advances in Iowa

NWestIowa.com (2/26, Helton) reports that the anti-pipeline movement has coalesced around a single bill in the Iowa Legislature. "We're looking at this to be our centerpiece," said Rep. Tom Jeneary (R-Le Mars). "I'm hoping we can get something done. I know that some folks would certainly like to see more, but this is something very workable." House File 368 takes aim at the several carbon-capture pipelines — from companies such as Summit Carbon Solutions and Navigator CO2 Ventures — that corporate interests are planning to build in the Hawkeye State. The bill would delay and possibly stop the carbon-capture projects in three main ways: Pipeline companies would need to get 90 percent of landowners on the route to sign a voluntary easement before eminent domain could be pursued. The Iowa Utilities

Board, the state's main authority on the pipelines, would not be allowed to permit the project until pipelines first get the go-ahead from other states involved. The IUB also would have to wait until federal safety rules on CO2 pipelines are completed, which likely will be sometime next year. Jeneary is one of the bill's co-sponsors. Before the 2023 legislative session began, he identified the issue as one of his main priorities this year. He added that House File 368 does not do enough to fully stop the threat of eminent domain. Since the pipelines are private ventures and would not have a public use, Jeneary and many other anti-pipelineers argue that any unwilling land seizures would be inappropriate. "Personally, I would like to see eminent domain fully stopped, but this might be a compromise," Jeneary said. The bill made it through its House Judiciary subcommittee hearing Tuesday, one of the first tangible steps in the legislative process. It will need to pass the full committee before heading to the full House floor. The hearing came later in the day after a group of a couple hundred anti-pipeline demonstrators met at the Capitol. Various groups opposed to the CO2 projects have made weekly visits to Des Moines during the legislative session, but organizers planned for Tuesday to be a particularly impactful gathering.

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National News

Lab Leak Most Likely Origin of Covid-19 Pandemic, Energy Department Now Says

The *Wall Street Journal* (2/26, Gordon, Strobel) and the *New York Times* (2/26, Barnes) reported that new intelligence has prompted the Department of Energy (DOE) to conclude that an accidental laboratory leak in China most likely caused the coronavirus pandemic, though U.S. spy agencies remain divided over the origins of the virus, American officials said on Sunday. According to the articles, officials briefed on the intelligence said that it was relatively weak and that the Energy Department's conclusion was made with "low confidence," suggesting its level of certainty was not high. The DOE's conclusion was a change from the department's earlier position that it was undecided on how the virus emerged, the articles added. Officials said they would not disclose what the intelligence was, but many of the DOE's insights come from its network of national laboratories, some of which conduct biological research, rather than more traditional forms of intelligence like spy networks or communications intercepts. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan on Sunday declined to confirm the intelligence, but said that President Biden had ordered that the national labs be brought into the effort to determine the origins of the outbreak so that the government was using "every tool" it had. Coverage noted that in addition to the DOE, the FBI has also concluded, with moderate confidence, that the virus first emerged accidentally from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, a Chinese lab. Sullivan also said if more information was learned, the administration would report it to Congress and the public. "But right now, there is not a definitive answer that has emerged from the intelligence community on this question," he said.

Biden's Student Loan Forgiveness Program Comes Before Supreme Court

The *Washington Post* (2/26, Barnes, Douglas-Gabriel) and the *Wall Street Journal* (2/26, Restuccia, Bravin) reported that President Biden's far-reaching initiative to forgive student loan debt will be debated this week before a Supreme Court that is skeptical of the administration's bold claims of power — a nearly half-trillion-dollar showdown that could affect more than 40 million Americans. According to the articles, Tuesday's oral arguments bring together a string of combustible issues: an ambitious program aimed at fulfilling a campaign promise for Biden's political base; heightened suspicion by the Supreme Court's conservative supermajority about the ability of federal agencies to act without specific congressional authorization; and the power of Republican-led states to use the judiciary to stop a president's priorities before they even take effect. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona says the administration has the authority to forgive student loan debt under the Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students Act of 2003, which allows the secretary to waive or modify loan provisions in response to a national emergency — in this case the coronavirus pandemic. Coverage noted that a brief

filed by 43 Republican senators said that the Biden administration does not have authorization to “make borrowers better off, and that the administration simply took advantage of the national emergency.” The articles also noted that the legal battles have left millions of student loan borrowers in limbo. More than half of eligible people had applied for the forgiveness program before it was halted by the courts, with the Education Department approving some 16 million applications. The department has assured borrowers that the administration will discharge the debt if it prevails in court.

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Washington Schedule

White House

President Biden

- 8:05 AM: The President departs New Castle, Delaware en route the White House
- 8:55 AM: The President arrives at the White House
- 11:15 AM: The President receives the Presidential Daily Briefing
- 5:00 PM: The President and The Vice President deliver remarks at a reception celebrating Black History Month

Vice President Harris

- No events scheduled.

U.S. Senate

- No events scheduled.

U.S. House of Representatives

- Business Meeting: H.R. 347 - Reduce Exacerbated Inflation Negatively Impacting the Nation Act; H.J. Res. 30 - Providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5 United States Code of the rule submitted by the Department of Labor relating to "Prudence and Loyalty in Selecting Plan Investments and Exercising Shareholder Rights". – 5:00 PM – Host: Judiciary Committee

Other Events

- No events scheduled.

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From: Soskin, Eric
To: Richmond, Nathan; Behm, Mitchell; Nossaman, Andrea
Cc: Hiep, Chuck G.
Subject: RE: Clips for Tuesday, April 25, 2023
Date: Tuesday, April 25, 2023 2:35:00 PM
Attachments: image001.png
image002.png

Thanks. Appreciate the heads-up and the comparison. I continue to agree that both charts are far from meaningful.

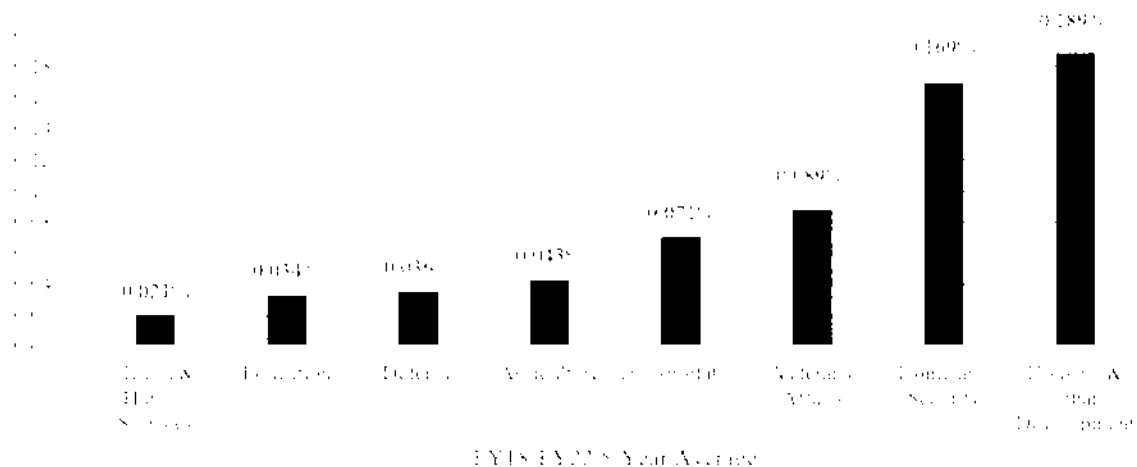
From: Richmond, Nathan <Nathan.Richmond@oig.dot.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, April 25, 2023 2:28 PM
To: Soskin, Eric <Eric.Soskin.IG@oig.dot.gov>; Behm, Mitchell <Mitchell.Behm@oig.dot.gov>; Nossaman, Andrea <Andrea.Nossaman@oig.dot.gov>
Cc: Hiep, Chuck G. <Chuck.G.Hiep@oig.dot.gov>
Subject: FW: Clips for Tuesday, April 25, 2023

In case you missed it from today's clips, there's a [GovExec](#) article about DHS-OIG's RO and their plea for more funding, which provides a similar chart to the one included in Teri Donahoe's three testimonies. By similar I mean similar in purpose only, because the actual content of the chart in the GovExec article differs dramatically from the one to which Teri testified. I don't know if the chart in the article was developed by DHS-OIG and provided to GovExec, or if it was developed by the GovExec reporter. In any event, it appears they at least got our number much more accurate than DOE-OIG did, describing our budget as representing 0.077% of the Department's overall budget over the past five years.

I've put the two charts side-by-side below, and the other interesting thing you might notice is that there are only three OIGs listed in both charts (DOI, HUD and DHS). DOE's chart would have you believe that our budget is a higher percentage of DOT's budget than DHS-OIG's is of DHS, followed after than a slightly lower percentage for HUD-OIG. However, GovExec's chart claims the exact opposite – that HUD-OIG has the highest percentage budget among the three, followed by DHS-OIG, and then DOT-OIG.

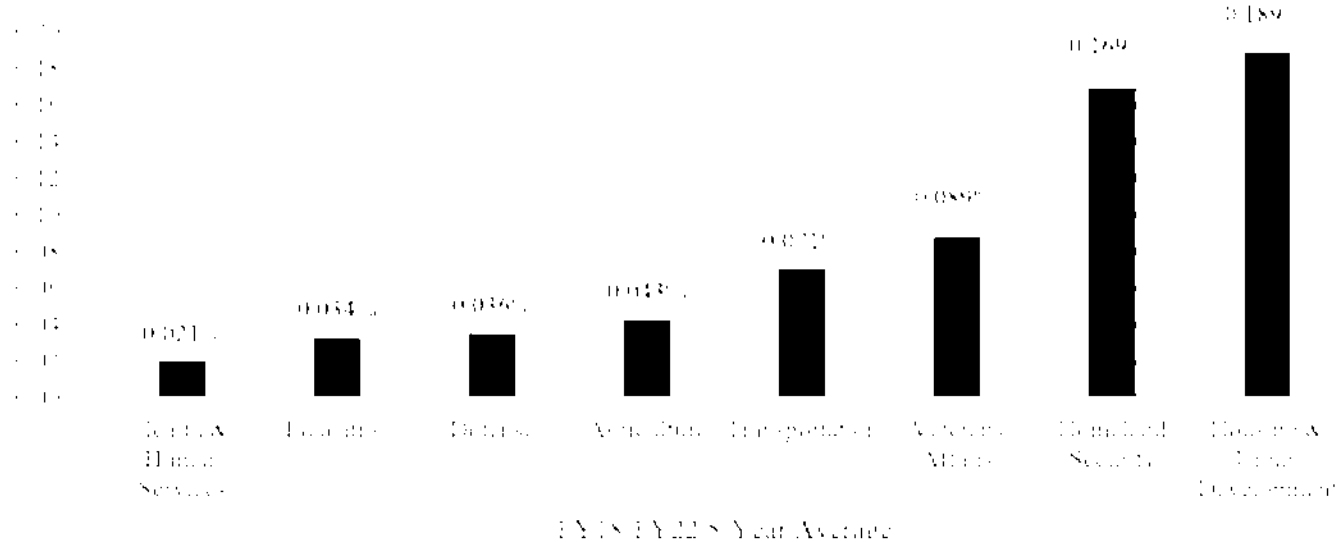
<https://www.govexec.com/policy/2023/04/how-the-and-human-services-watchdog-warned-no-cost-funding-over-spend/305735/>

Average OIG Spending as a Percentage of Department Spending Over the Past Five Fiscal Years

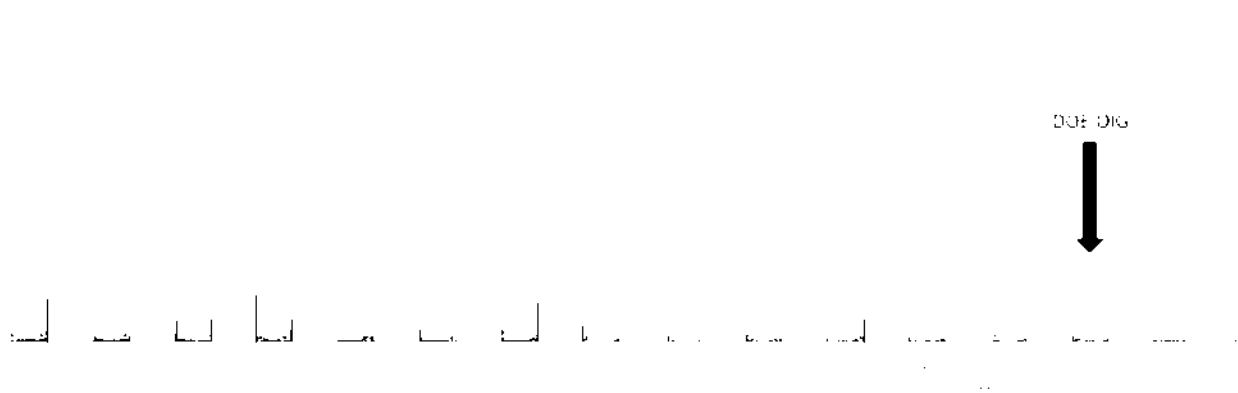


<https://epublicans.senate.house.gov/career/es/c/cc69d137-584b-40ce-a033-2e6cde5230ce/55723C2810782179EA07C6E41D1B914-2023-04-19-donahoe-testimony.pdf#page=7>

Average OIG Spending as a Percentage of Department Spending Over the Past Five Fiscal Years



CFO Act Agency Budget vs. OIG Budget (FY2022) Excluding Four Largest and Four Smallest Agencies



Subject: Clips for Tuesday, April 25, 2023

- [CNN The Lead Interview: Transportation Secretary Buttigieg on GOP Demands for Spending Cuts](#)
- [Boston 25 Interview, Massachusetts: Air Traffic Controllers](#)
- [Politico Weekly Transportation: FAA Faces a Leadership Vacuum](#)
- [Buttigieg Puts Spotlight on Highway Deaths](#)
- [Ohio: Plane Fire Puts Renewed Focus on Recurring Bird Strikes](#)
- [SpaceX Starship Explosion Spread Particulate Matter for Miles](#)
- [Women Are Less Than 3% of Aviation Maintenance Technicians. Why?](#)
- [Northern Mariana Islands, Guam: Governor Discusses Airports Woes with FAA on Guam](#)
- [Parts maker pleads guilty in Hansen fraud case *\[OIG investigation\]*](#)
- [FMCSA Declares Driver an Imminent Hazard After Killing 4 With Big Rig](#)
- [California, Nevada: Las Vegas-To-California Bullet Train Gets Bipartisan Backing](#)
- [Massachusetts: Feds Tighten Leash On Embattled Massachusetts Transit Agency; Gov. Healey Just Appointed the First MassDOT Safety Chief](#)
- [Michelin Recalls 500,000 Tires Over Traction Concerns](#)
- [U.S. OKs Spectrum Use for Vehicle Crash Prevention Technology](#)
- [Conservative Think Tanks Are Preparing a List of 20K Potential Political Appointees in Hopes of Reviving Schedule F](#)
- [Federal prison system, cybersecurity, human capital and more on GAO's high risk list](#)
- [Health and Human Services Watchdog: We Need More Funding for Oversight](#)

April 25, 2023
Department of Transportation

SECRETARY IN THE NEWS

- CNN The Lead Interview: Transportation Secretary Buttigieg on GOP Demands for Spending Cuts
- KNXV Interview, Arizona: Pete Buttigieg Discusses the Future of Electric Vehicles in Arizona
- Boston 25 Interview, Massachusetts: Air Traffic Controllers
- Politico Weekly Transportation: FAA Faces a Leadership Vacuum
- Buttigieg Puts Spotlight on Highway Deaths
- Oklahoma: Biden Administration Wants to Boost Aviation Sector Training In OKC

DOT IN THE NEWS

- Louisiana: Sen. Cassidy Hosts Rural Community Funding Summit in Leesville
- Wall Street Journal: Here's How Supply Chains Are Being Reshaped for a New Era of Global Trade
- The New Yorker: The Climate Solutions We Can't Live Without
- Wall Street Journal: Biden Is Transformational, and Not in a Good Way
- Ironically, Biden's the One Making America Great Again
- Dems Fight Inflation Reduction Act Ignorance
- How Are the Billions in Biden's Climate Law Being Spent?
- Oklahoma: Reference to 'White Male' Advantages Booed on Oklahoma House Floor
- Susan Rice, Biden's Top Domestic Policy Adviser, Departing

FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

- Ohio: Plane Fire Puts Renewed Focus on Recurring Bird Strikes
- SpaceX Starship Explosion Spread Particulate Matter for Miles
- California: Electric Autonomous Drones Get Approval to Spray California Crops
- Women Are Less Than 3% of Aviation Maintenance Technicians. Why?
- Northern Mariana Islands, Guam: Governor Discusses Airports Woes with FAA on Guam
- New York, New Jersey: As Deal Pushes Helicopters Away from Statue of Liberty, Will Noise Disrupt NJ Suburbs?
- Boeing Investors Seek Answers After Latest 737 Production Glitch
- Southwest Airlines Meteorologists Reach Tentative Contract Deal with Dallas Carrier
- US Airlines Plot a Course Away from Another Costly Summer of Chaos
- Delta Could Bump Even More People Off Flights as It Looks to Increase 'Overbooking' to Wring Out More Profits
- DOJ Joins Investigation of Southwest's Holiday Flight Meltdown: Was Schedule 'Unrealistic'?
- Connecticut: Avelo CEO Vows Changes After 'a Very Painful Three Days' Rocks the Airline
- Ohio: NASA Glenn Research Could Help Speed Up Commercial Air Travel
- Plus-Size Traveler Demands Additional Seating and Better Airline Accommodations
- Virginia: How Loudoun Co. Hopes to Reduce Noise from Dulles Airport's Flight Paths at Nearby Homes
- Ohio: City Picks Consulting Team to Analyze Economics of Closing, Redeveloping Burke Lakefront Airport

- Arkansas: Sky Is the Limit for 3 Arkansas Licensed Pilots Still in High School
- Vermont: Caledonia Aviation Community Optimistic About Proposed Airport Sale
- Florida: Naples Airport Holding Disaster Preparedness Exercise Tuesday
- Texas: McKinney Residents to Decide on Multi-Million Dollar Bond Package for Airport Expansion
- New Jersey: United Airlines Flight to Israel Turns Back After Passenger Gets into a Shouting Match with Crew
- Florida: Small Plane Crashes on Golf Course Near Wellington, Sending Pilot to Trauma Center
- Texas: Pilot Airlifted to Hospital After Small Plane Crashes at La Porte Airport

FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

- Maryland: Leaders Celebrate Funding for Removal of 'Highway to Nowhere'
- Ohio: 'A Missed Opportunity': Former Mayors Cranley, Mallory Want Changes in Brent Spence Design
- Massachusetts: Opponents of Bike Lanes Are Back with an Analysis Showing the Safety Measures Cause More Injuries
- Tennessee: TDOT Commissioner Eley Talks Transportation Modernization Act in Clarksville
- Connecticut: State Adopts New Exit Numbers for I-691. Here's Why.
- Tennessee: Traffic to the Smokies Keeps Increasing. Is a New Interstate 40 Exit a Possible Solution?
- Vermont: VTrans Works on Several Projects as Construction Season Begins
- Texas: 'I Didn't Really Enjoy the Idea of It': More Teens Are Putting Off Learning to Drive
- New York: New York Launches Highway Work Zone Speed Camera Program: Here's What You Need to Know
- New York: Oneida Receives Money for More Electric Vehicle Charging Stations
- FHWA Offering Grants to Protect Infrastructure from Climate Change Impacts
- Wisconsin: De Pere Selling Old Street Signs as City Transitions to New Ones

FEDERAL MOTOR CARRIER SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

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- Truckers And Lawmakers Pitch Tax Repeal to Meet Emission Goals
 - Freight Routes to Get Electric, Hydrogen Infrastructure Aid
 - FMCSA Declares Driver an Imminent Hazard After Killing 4 With Big Rig
 - Oklahoma: Marshallese CDL Bill, Authored by Sen. Pederson Passes State House
 - California: Amazon Delivery Drivers in Southern California Join Teamsters Union
 - How Aurora Is Navigating the Bumpy Road to Commercial Self-Driving Trucks
 - Yellow, Teamsters to Hash Out Operational Changes by Reopening NMFA Early

FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION

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- California, Nevada: Las Vegas-To-California Bullet Train Gets Bipartisan Backing
 - 3 Railroads Join Up to Compete with CPKC To Serve Mexico
 - Sick Leave, Crew Consists Still of the Table Between Unions, Railroads
 - Pennsylvania: Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Project Brought to the Attention of Senior White House Advisor
 - California: Coastal Erosion Threatens to Further Derail OC Train Lines
 - Texas: Union Pacific to Test Soil of Houston's Fifth Ward Residents Amid Claims of Cancer Cluster
 - Missouri: Amtrak Plans \$13M Project At Union Station
 - North Dakota: Railroad Gets Final Permits to Replace Bismarck-Mandan Rail Bridge; Work on \$100M Project Beginning
 - Maryland: MARC Eyes Regional Service Expansion to Delaware, Virginia
 - New York: Congressman Marc Molinaro Holds Railroad Industry Roundtable for the Southern Tier
 - New York: DOT Confirms Truck Hit CSX Bridge Over Onondaga Lake Parkway After Sheriff's

Deputies Were Told Otherwise

- New York: Repairs Underway on Bridge Dripping Sticky Substance

FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION

- Sen. Markey, Rep. Pressley Announce New Push for Fare-Free Public Transit Across the Country
- Massachusetts: Feds Tighten Leash On Embattled Massachusetts Transit Agency; Gov. Healey Just Appointed the First MassDOT Safety Chief
- The Filthy Truth About Subway Air
- The Incredible Shrinking Transit Plan
- Texas: Project Connect Could Be on the Ballot Again This November
- Missouri: Federal Grant Helps Keep Buses Rolling
- North Carolina: CATS On the Ground - A Charlotte Public Transit Experiment
- California: Gov. Gavin Newsom Allocates Millions to Fund Public Transportation Projects in Disadvantaged Communities
- California: 'There Are No People Here' - S.F.'S \$2.2 Billion Transit Center Remains an Empty Cavern
- New York: NYC Subway Fare Hike Postponed Because of State Budget Delay

GREAT LAKES ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

- Ohio: Port of Cleveland Solicits Bids on Estimated \$55 Million Stabilization of Irishtown Bend Hillside
- Michigan: Freighter Runs Aground Near Muskegon Channel

MARITIME ADMINISTRATION

- California: Singapore, Los Angeles, and Long Beach Agree to Green Corridor
- Wall Street Journal: The Jones Act Is Unconstitutional
- New Jersey: Gov. Murphy Kills Another Watchdog
- New Jersey: Panel: Climate Change, Not Wind Prep, Is Threat to Whales
- Push for IMO to Set 'Ambitious' Climate Goals for Shipping
- FMC Commissioners Support Bill to Strengthen Anticompetitive Powers
- Georgia: Ports Authority Sees Sustained Growth in Ro/Ro Cargo Handling
- Greywing's New SeaGPT Solves Email Overwhelm for Maritime Crew Managers
- Maryland: 'Offshore Wind Capital of America': What's in Environmental Bills Signed by Wes Moore

NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

- Washington Post: San Francisco Is a Postcard from a Driverless Car Future. Here's What It's Like.
- Call Me a Dummy Feminist
- EPA's Electric Vehicle Plan Would Hurt Working-Class Car Buyers
- New York: Lawsuit Against Kia, Hyundai to Be Filed by Rochester
- GM Recalls 40,000 Silverado Pickups Over Fire Risk
- Wall Street Journal: Toyota Pitches a New Prius as Plug-In Hybrids Battle EVs for Share
- Tesla Raises 2023 Spending Forecast as It Races to Ramp Up Output
- Only 10 Carmakers Will Survive Global EV Battle, Says Tesla Rival Xpeng
- GM, Ford Strive to Convince Investors: No Price War with Tesla
- China's DriveGPT Is Here. Time to Play Catch-Up
- Florida: Stolen Hyundai Used in Crash That Kills One
- Illinois: Traffic Deaths Dip Slightly in 2022, but Fatalities Are Still Above Pre-Pandemic Levels: 'Not a Cause to Celebrate.'
- New York: NYC Council Considers Bills to Improve Bicycle Safety, Deputize Citizens to Crack Down on Violations

- Washington: Legislature Abandons Most Traffic Safety Bills as Fatalities Continue to Mount
- Nevada: More Motorcycles on the Road, Law Enforcement Says Stay Vigilant
- Michelin Recalls 500,000 Tires Over Traction Concerns

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY/ BUREAU OF TRANSPORTATION STATISTICS

- U.S. OKs Spectrum Use for Vehicle Crash Prevention Technology
- This Machine Learning Project Could Help Jumpstart Self-Driving Cars Again

PIPELINE & HAZARDOUS MATERIALS SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

- Virginia, West Virginia: Granholm Backs Mountain Valley Pipeline; Landowners' Lawsuit Against MVP Revived by U.S. Supreme Court

NATIONAL NEWS

- Fox News Ousts Tucker Carlson
- Don Lemon Fired From CNN After Divisive Morning Show Run

Washington Schedule

Secretary in the News

CNN The Lead Interview: Transportation Secretary Buttigieg on GOP Demands for Spending Cuts

CNN's The Lead with Jake Tapper (4/24) shares an interview with Secretary Buttigieg. On the Justice Department joining the Southwest holiday meltdown investigation, Buttigieg says, "They're joining this process at a time when we have two lines of efforts going on. One has to do with making sure passengers are fully taken care of. We have a lot of enforcement commitments from Southwest last year about how they would treat passengers in this scenario. Now we're using our enforcement power to make sure those people got everything they're entitled to under that customer service plan we negotiated prior to that meltdown. The second piece has to do with realistic schedules; we need to make sure the airlines are prepared to service the tickets they sell. Both of these are parts of ongoing work we're doing. Whether it's Southwest Airlines or any airline, we always stand prepared to make sure passengers get the support they need when these situations happen."

On air safety and this weekend's bird strike incident, Buttigieg notes, "That's right. This is an ongoing safety concern. Air travel in America is the safest form of transportation. In order to keep it that way, we are always looking at new developments and trying to make sure there is even more safety built into the system. What happened in this case of the flight that no one wants to look out the window and see what these passengers saw. The flight crew of course returned that plane safely to the ground and everybody was taken care of there. But what we're interested in in addition to making sure there are those safety systems that allow an airplane to safely land with one engine operational where necessary is to try to prevent these bird strikes from happening in the first place. FAA does a lot of research on bird and wildlife for precisely this reason. It may sound like a quirky area of research until you realize there is life on the line. Everything from bird habitats and bird behavior changing to the evolution of engines that are more efficient and therefore quieter means that we might need to undertake new specifications, new measures to try to minimize those bird strikes that are a real concern."

On air traffic controllers and staffing, Buttigieg says, "We're acting to make sure that airlines are accountable for serving passengers well. We've seen so far improvement this year compared to last year. Certainly I will not be resting easy as we look at the numbers week by week and day by day. On the

air traffic control side, we are doing a ton of hiring right now to make sure we get more qualified air traffic controllers as the demand increases and some controllers retire."

Buttigieg adds, "This is also one reason I'm very concerned about some of the extreme proposals we see coming from members of the House GOP. When they talk about cutting nondiscretionary spending, one of the things they're talking about cutting is our ability to grow the air traffic work force. This is the exact wrong time to be doing that. So whether it's the proposal from the extreme House Republicans to cut the air traffic control funds or the effect that that would have on railroad safety at a time when we're all rightly paying attention to that, I think this is the wrong time to be cutting railroad inspections. I don't think there's ever a good time to do that, but definitely not now. These are the things that are at stake. Our budget proposal is one that will prepare us for things like the ability to maintain our aviation system in good, working order."

On recent comments from Rep. Boebert on transportation, Buttigieg also notes, "This is why we have to call anybody who wants to make political hay out of transportation issues to the carpet and say are you serious or not. Rep. Boebert was talking about derailments without in any way acknowledging that freedom caucus budget proposal would cut inspection days, meaning less inspections going to cut railroad derailments and accidents. We have to make sure everyone out there trying to politicize safety issues is accountable for what their proposals would actually do. If you're one of these extreme House Republicans that would cut budgets and cut our ability to hire air traffic controllers and inspect railroads, you have to be accountable for that position."

KNXV Interview, Arizona: Pete Buttigieg Discusses the Future of Electric Vehicles in Arizona

Arizona's KNXV (4/24, Ciletti; video link) shares an interview with Secretary Buttigieg. On the benefits of electric vehicles to Arizona, Buttigieg notes, "Look at the investment coming to Arizona. 5.5 billion dollars for this LG project, you've got another battery manufacturer planning a gigafactory in the Tucson area, and it's part of the bigger focus that we've had as an administration on creating good paying American jobs - including in manufacturing." Buttigieg adds, "So in addition to the climate in addition to the strategic just that the simple fact that we're going to have a lot of good paying jobs on American soil in Arizona is one of the things that we're most excited about was this work."

Buttigieg also discusses the lower costs involved with owning an electric vehicle, and the station notes Buttigieg's comments on the future of the EV charging network.

Boston 25 Interview, Massachusetts: Air Traffic Controllers

Boston 25 News (4/24) briefly interviews Secretary Buttigieg on air traffic controllers and staffing, where he notes, "We are doing a ton of hiring right now to make sure we get more qualified air traffic controllers as the demand increases and some controllers retire."

Politico Weekly Transportation: FAA Faces a Leadership Vacuum

Politico's Weekly Transportation (4/24, Guo, Daugherty) notes that the White House has struggled to find a permanent leader for the FAA. [Politico] learned that Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg asked Nolen to stay on longer after Phil Washington, the Biden administration's nominee for the top job, withdrew his candidacy, but Nolen said he wasn't interested in the permanent role — though there was no shortage of those in the aviation industry and on the Hill who saw him as the logical candidate for the permanent job.

Buttigieg said he prefers the Senate's version of rail safety legislation to the House's and that waiting until the NTSB issues its final report on the derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, to pass legislation is the wrong approach. He said that some of the industry's practices that in his opinion weaken safety "will

continue unless Congress raises the bar.” “That’s why we’re making the case here on Capitol Hill every chance that we have,” Buttigieg said. “I’m encouraged by the Senate bill that’s been proposed because it includes some but not all of the measures that I called for. And the House version seems to not be quite as fulsome as the Senate version, but many of those steps are positive, too.”

The Senate’s rail safety bill, S. 576 (118), would mandate two-person crews on freight trains and is being led by Ohio Sens. J.D. Vance and Sherrod Brown. The House version of the bill, H.R. 1633 (118), which is also bipartisan, doesn’t include the two-person-crew requirement. While House Transportation Chair Sam Graves (R-Mo.) and Senate Minority Whip John Thune (R-S.D.) have suggested waiting until the NTSB investigation is complete to fashion legislation, Buttigieg wants action sooner. “We may learn more a year from now with the NTSB report,” Buttigieg said. “But just to be clear, this is one of many incidents that the NTSB is evaluating in rail alone and there are more every year. So if we’re waiting until there’s the final last word ever, we’d be waiting forever.”

Buttigieg Puts Spotlight on Highway Deaths

Transport Topics (4/24, Mulero) notes that promoting safety on the highways remains the dominant priority for officials at the Department of Transportation and agencies throughout the country. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, a safety advocate championing funding increases for NHTSA, sought to capture the meaning of the agency’s latest estimate. “We continue to face a national crisis of traffic deaths on our roadways, and everyone has a role to play in reversing the rise that we experienced in recent years,” Buttigieg said in a statement April 20, as he pointed to the department’s comprehensive safety policy action plan. “Through our National Roadway Safety Strategy,” as Buttigieg put it, “we’re strengthening traffic safety across the country, and working toward a day when these preventable tragedies are a thing of the past.” In acknowledging the severity of the matter, the Biden administration has issued various directives meant to improve transportation safety.

Oklahoma: Biden Administration Wants to Boost Aviation Sector Training In OKC

The Oklahoman (4/24, Denwalt) notes that the Federal Aviation Administration will train 1,500 air traffic controllers in Oklahoma City this year. If the president gets his wish, the FAA’s Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center will train another 1,800 next year. The need for a boost in air traffic control is part of a nationwide push to build up the country’s infrastructure capabilities after the passage of President Joe Biden’s 2021 \$1 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. In a recent visit to Oklahoma City and the FAA center, U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said Biden’s infrastructure priorities will test the nation’s productive capacity. “That’s how much steel can be sourced, and that’s how much raw material going into electric vehicle batteries can be sourced,” he said. “But above all, it’s how much human talent that we can build. And I think we’re still leaving too much talent on the table for people who just don’t realize that they could belong in the aviation sector.”

“For all of the technology, all the metal and concrete and wiring that goes into our national aviation system, the most important part by far is people,” Buttigieg said after touring the FAA center and meeting with both employees and air traffic controller trainees. “We’ve got to make sure that we have the workforce of the future being prepared today.” During the pandemic, Buttigieg said the big policy challenge with the aviation sector was the very real concern of companies going out of business. “And literally a year later, business is so good that the big policy challenge is, are we making sure that the airlines are actually prepared to service the tickets that they sell?” he said.

Biden’s transportation budget request includes funding for the training of 1,800 new air traffic controllers in Oklahoma City to help fill the need nationwide. It’s now up to Congress to decide whether to approve that request. “Even just to meet the immediate demand, we are working to step up training and readiness because it can take a couple of years just to be qualified to safely operate in one of our air

traffic control facilities," Buttigieg said. "Add to that the need to make sure we have a workforce that's ready for the long haul as aviation goes through all of the changes that are (coming) in the next five, 10, 20 years, and that's exactly why this facility here in Oklahoma City is, in my opinion, one of the most important in the country when it comes to transportation."

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DOT in the News

Louisiana: Sen. Cassidy Hosts Rural Community Funding Summit in Leesville

KALB (4/24, Noakes) reports that since it was signed into law, grant applications have poured in for funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Several major cities have received significant grants, like Alexandria for improving its natural gas distribution systems and Leesville for its airport. However, not every city or town in America is set up for success in getting their portion, especially those in rural areas. That is why U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy, who authored the IIJA, has hosted a series of Rural Community Funding Summits around the state, including Monday in Leesville. "I want them to understand that they can use these dollars with the resources created for them to do the grant, do the engineering and do the compliance," said Cassidy. "To take their small town and make it a better town, to make it a bigger town, to give it a better future, to make it a place where your children and grandchildren decide to stay and even a place where others decide to move to. This can reshape our state in such a positive way starting with our smaller towns."

Wall Street Journal: Here's How Supply Chains Are Being Reshaped for a New Era of Global Trade

Wall Street Journal (4/24, Page) reports that when a measure of strains on global supply chains fell earlier this year to levels last seen before the Covid-19 pandemic, it signaled to some that the product shortages, port bottlenecks and shipping disruptions of the past three years were over and that a new era of stability was on the horizon. But industry experts say a "return to normal," as the Federal Reserve Bank of New York described its Global Supply Chain Pressure Index in February, hardly means that companies are going back to conventional, some would say complacent, supply chains. Instead, say academics and consultants, the experiences during the pandemic, along with changes in geopolitics, are leading to broader, potentially long-lasting changes in how companies manage the flow of goods, from the sourcing of raw materials to manufacturing and distribution. The changes are playing out at factories in India, auto-assembly plants in northern Mexico, ports from the U.S. Southeast to East Africa and mineral mines in Canada and Sweden. The sites are where companies are implementing disciplines such as resilience, regionalization and supplier diversification that came to the forefront as they coped with the severe disruptions that began in early 2020.

The New Yorker: The Climate Solutions We Can't Live Without

The New Yorker (4/24, Gross) notes that a few years ago, a report funded by the U.S. Department of Transportation investigated the prototypical bottleneck: the traffic jam. Historically, Americans have blamed traffic on a lack of capacity—"not enough lanes" or "too many cars." As a result, the authors argued, we have often tried to "build our way out" by widening entire highways at enormous expense. But bad traffic often starts with a local logjam—for example, at a single place where three lanes narrow into two—and then cascades across the system. This means that the government doesn't need to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on major highway projects. Instead, it can spend, perhaps, a million dollars to widen a bottleneck with an additional lane. Better yet, it can do what the Texas Department of Transportation did to a bottleneck on U.S. Route 183, in North Austin: spend fifty-five thousand dollars to restripe the road, so that two lanes become three. "If it was this easy and this cheap, what took you so long?" one local asked, when the traffic dissipated.

Bottlenecks, according to the report, are often the places where targeted efforts can make the most difference. Turn this lens onto the energy system and new insights may come into view. In many parts of the U.S., it's clear from the line to join the grid that there's an abundance of wind and solar and battery projects. For that reason, a million dollars might be better spent on electrical-system upgrades than on new subsidies to incentivize clean-energy projects. A subsidy primarily benefits the project that receives it, but even a small improvement in the interconnection queue could benefit all the projects that are waiting in line. Likewise, if you're in the mood to badger your lawmakers about something, consider badgering them about whichever government agencies are standing in the way of new transmission lines. On a national level, the Biden Administration could staff up federal agencies that review permits, such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the U.S. Forest Service; the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which already approves regional natural-gas pipelines, could be empowered to approve regional transmission lines. It's also possible to find routes around the bottlenecks: it's sometimes argued that clean-energy projects shouldn't pool their electricity on a rickety grid in the first place, and should instead power local microgrids, such as university campuses or apartment complexes.

The theory of bottlenecks could amount to a hopeful strategy for supercharging the fight against climate change. The basic principle is to look for the sources of gridlock in the system, and to focus on restoring flow before worrying about individual cars. A functional citywide composting system is worth far more than a few isolated piles of food scraps; similarly, a new car-charging station, in a neighborhood where it's hard to find one, could cut emissions more than any one person's pledge to drive less. These structural changes will not come easily, but they can help us focus our efforts. A city or state that wants to spur rooftop solar should look for where the longest lines are forming: if solar panels are piling up in warehouses because customers can't afford them, subsidies might help; if those who've bought panels are waiting months for someone to hook them up, the government could consider launching a free certification program for solar installers, or a clean-energy vocational scholarship through a local trade school. And, if the longest lines are for permits at city hall, then maybe it's time to hire more office workers. "An hour lost at a bottleneck is an hour lost for the entire system," Eliyahu M. Goldratt, a business consultant and process theorist who authored several novels about management—among them "It's Not Luck," "Necessary but Not Sufficient," and "Isn't It Obvious?"—once wrote.

Over time, if clean-energy investments are successful, the bottlenecks will move. After America has trained a million new tradespeople, we might find ourselves waiting on solar companies to build new factories. When the interconnection queue shrinks to one year, it might be time to badger your legislators about wind and solar projects, not wires. The same logic can also be applied to fossil-fuel infrastructure, but in the opposite direction. One argument for protesting against oil and gas pipelines is that they're bottlenecks. This is also why climate activists were so disappointed when the Biden Administration approved ConocoPhillips's sprawling Willow oil project, in Alaska: red tape might have been enough to keep that oil in the ground.

Other breakthroughs have the potential to cascade across large sectors of the economy. If shipping companies succeed in decarbonizing cargo ships, some of the dirtiest vehicles on earth will get a little less dirty, and the carbon footprint of virtually every consumer will go down. A small advance in cooling technology, like a cheaper heat pump or a superefficient air-conditioner, will be multiplied by the billions of people who will need one as the planet warms. And, given that many machines, from heat pumps to cars, will be in service for decades to come, a dollar spent on research and development is probably worth a lot more today than years from now. Of course, pessimistic scenarios flow from these same principles, too: even a step in the right direction may be meaningless if a bottleneck later stops you in your tracks. "An hour saved at a non-bottleneck is a mirage," Goldratt warns.

Wall Street Journal: Biden Is Transformational, and Not in a Good Way

An opinion piece in *Wall Street Journal* (4/24, Gramm, Toomey) argues that from Wall Street to Silicon Valley, from the Permian Basin to the Chicago Loop, an iron net of regulation has descended across the American economy. Churchill's metaphor conveys the magnitude of the onslaught and the peril it poses to the American economy and our freedom. We face not an errant regulator or an officious bureaucrat, but a sea change in the economy's regulatory ecosystem. The executive branch and its regulatory agencies are unbound by the laws they are supposed to uphold and hostile to the industries they regulate, undermining the political accountability at the heart of our republican government. In the short term, President Biden's regulatory tsunami will fuel inflation and make a recession more likely. In the long term, it could smother America's productivity, wages and living standards. If the U.S. puts on a European-style rules straitjacket, American economic exceptionalism will perish. That the federal government's regulatory power would be dramatically different during the Biden administration was revealed on day one, when the president instructed every department, agency and office to tilt the scales of cost-benefit analysis by counting "social welfare, racial justice, environmental stewardship, human dignity, equity, and the interests of future generations" in measuring the benefits of government action. Though interest rates have tripled in the past two years, the administration is now reducing the discount rate used to value future benefits of its regulations by 75%, thereby artificially inflating their value. Thus traditional cost-benefit analysis, begun under President Carter to constrain government, is being used to expand government's power and reach. Administration officials and regulators enforce environmental policies never adopted by Congress. Using corporate average fuel economy standards designed to conserve fossil fuels, the Transportation Department seeks to end fossil-fuel use with unachievable standards. With no basis in law, the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency forces banks, and the Securities and Exchange Commission compels public companies, to implement environmental policy and either pass those costs on to consumers or absorb them in lower profits.

Ironically, Biden's the One Making America Great Again

An opinion piece in *The Hill* (4/24, Ramesh) argues that Biden's administration's legacy will also be that it revived the American spirit without splitting the social fabric at the seams. The administration's "America first" agenda is evident through its legislations such as the CHIPS and Science Act, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that have allocated funds and offered subsidies to stimulate investments, particularly in the infrastructure and renewable energy sector. Based on *Financial Times* reports, the policies have already led to over \$200 billion in investment plans by chip and renewable energy manufacturing companies. In the mid-1990s, from critical mineral processing to chip manufacturing, the U.S. was a leader with a significant share of manufacturing. Fast forward to 2023, the U.S. has lost out to China, and even to its East Asian partners such as Taiwan, Korea and Japan in chip manufacturing. Through industrial policies, Biden is reviving the economic glory of the 90s by reshoring American manufacturing. Biden's supply chain review, followed by successive legislative wins, has empowered his administration to execute policies that strengthen America's manufacturing base. Neoliberal economists and publications that initially unleashed a barrage of criticism toward Biden's industrial policies have now acknowledged this initial success that has spurred over \$200 billion in new investments across America. From reviving manufacturing competitiveness to addressing the environment and foreign policy challenges, the Biden administration has brought America back to business — or, to revise Trump's slogan, has, "made America great again."

Dems Fight Inflation Reduction Act Ignorance

Axios (4/24, Holzman, Sobczyk) reports what key House Democrats said at an *Axios Pro* event Friday about their plans to sell voters on their party's climate agenda. The Inflation Reduction Act contains huge consumer-oriented climate subsidies, but half the country has no clue what the IRA is, according to recent polls. Democrats are trying to boost awareness of the IRA as Republicans try to publicly tar the law and use debt talks to defund some of its major programs. At the *Axios Pro* event, held in connection

with Earth Day, former House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer explained how Democrats' Regional Leadership Council is essential to widely marketing the IRA. The idea of the council — a group of 12 Democrats — is to tell Americans, "This is what we've done. This is what is available. It's going to bring down your costs," Hoyer told Nick. That means publicizing things like the IRA's 25C tax credit, which offers as much as \$2,000 for home heat pumps. The group has been meeting with Biden administration officials, including John Podesta and Mitch Landrieu — the White House leads for IRA and infrastructure law implementation. "[Biden] has asked every Cabinet member to have a person directly focused on this issue and for them to work with our regional council," Hoyer said. At the event, council member Jared Huffman explained how Democrats should push back against anti-IRA publicity. He wants his colleagues to focus on what the law is doing for GOP districts, a tactic the White House has begun using in negotiations. "You are already seeing billions and billions of dollars of investment pouring in to communities around this country ... A lot of this is happening in red states and red congressional districts," he said.

How Are the Billions in Biden's Climate Law Being Spent?

In a podcast, Bloomberg (4/24) notes that it's been eight months since President Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act into law. And already the hundreds of billions of dollars it contains for clean energy and slowing climate change—alongside private venture capital investments—are funding a wide array of climate technology projects, from decarbonization infrastructure to rust-based battery storage. Bloomberg climate reporter Eric Roston joins this episode with Akshat Rathi, a senior reporter and host of our sister podcast Zero. It's a weekly show that explores the tactics and technologies taking us to a world of zero emissions. They talk with Wes about how climate tech is no longer a corner of the economy—it's fast becoming the economy. And reporter Zahra Hirji joins to talk about some of the ways the IRA's spending is starting to show up in our everyday lives.

Oklahoma: Reference to 'White Male' Advantages Booed on Oklahoma House Floor

Tulsa World (4/24, Krehbiel) reports that boos pierced an otherwise quiet afternoon in the Oklahoma House of Representatives on Monday after a relatively routine bill on small-business development turned into a debate on "reverse discrimination" and the plight of white males. Senate Bill 119, by Sen. Michael Bergstrom, R-Adair, would somewhat broaden eligibility for the Oklahoma Supplier Diversity Initiative, a state Department of Commerce program intended to connect small businesses with potential customers, including state agencies. It especially targets small businesses owned by minorities, women and U.S. military veterans by providing some technical assistance on applications and the like and by listing them on a website promoted to potential clients. The "minorities and women" part is what caught the attention of state Rep. Jim Olsen. "In light of history, ... I'm concerned about favoring or disfavoring somebody based on gender or race," said Olsen. "Suppose we had another program and said, 'We're going to give a little bit of an edge to white males. We're going to allow everybody to apply, but we're going to give a little bit of an edge to white males.' Would that be OK?"

House sponsor Mark Lepak, R-Claremore, deflected the question by pointing out that it had nothing to do with his bill, but it prompted a response from Rep. Regina Goodwin, D-Tulsa. "When you talk about diversity, as it relates to white males, they already get a great majority of the jobs in the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Act," Goodwin said, referring to a U.S. Department of Transportation program. That brought boos from unidentified members of the House and a further rejoinder from Goodwin. "Is this trying to level the playing field for all the white males who are booing?" she asked, addressing her questions to Lepak under the rules of the House. "Would you agree they've already enjoyed a great privilege in America as it relates to jobs?" Olsen and Goodwin then both debated against the bill for diametrically opposed reasons. Olsen claimed that the original program, at least, is an example of "reverse discrimination," while Goodwin said the measure itself dilutes a program intended to help

women, minorities, disabled veterans and other disadvantaged groups with small businesses. The bill passed 65-23 with the title and enacting clause off, meaning it's still a long way from final adoption.

Susan Rice, Biden's Top Domestic Policy Adviser, Departing

AP (4/24, Long) reports that President Joe Biden said Monday that his top domestic policy adviser, Susan Rice, will leave her post next month. As director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, Rice had broad sway on the administration's approach to health care, immigration and racial inequality. It was a surprising shift for Rice, a longtime Democratic foreign policy expert who served as President Barack Obama's national security adviser and U.N. ambassador, the only person to serve in both positions. Rice went into the job a flashpoint for Republican attacks dating back to the Obama years. In her wide-ranging tenure at the helm of Biden's domestic agenda, she helped oversee a flurry of executive and legislative action, including on health care, policing, gun safety, racial equity and the massive \$1 trillion infrastructure bill. "I am so proud of all we have been able to accomplish together for the American people," Rice said in a tweet, in which she thanked Biden. Politico (4/24, Fraizer, Cancryn, Ward) reports that among those being eyed as a replacement for her include Neera Tanden, Biden's staff secretary and a senior adviser, four people with knowledge of the deliberations told Politico. Separately, a top White House official said no replacement had been identified yet. One former administration official said White House aides were talking openly about Tanden's consideration for Rice's job over the weekend, calling her potential appointment "pretty damn firm."

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Federal Aviation Administration

Ohio: Plane Fire Puts Renewed Focus on Recurring Bird Strikes

AP (4/24, Shipkowski) reports that shortly after an ordinary takeoff from an Ohio airport on Sunday, passengers aboard an American Airlines plane became alarmed when they heard loud noises and saw flames shooting out of an engine. Moments later, when they learned a bird strike had caused an issue, many feared the worst. They took to their phones and social media to spread the word as the hobbled plane returned to the airport and landed without incident or injury. The airline said the plane was taken out of service for maintenance and that the passengers were booked on other flights. The facility remained operating as usual, and the fire only caused some minor flight delays, airport officials said. The Federal Aviation Administration is investigating the matter. The strike has again put a spotlight on the problems pilots, carriers and airports are facing as expanding bird and wildlife populations are making such strikes more commonplace, along with increased air traffic by quieter, turbofan-powered aircraft.

According to the Federal Aviation Administration, 15,556 strikes were reported in 2021, an increase of 33% from the 11,666 strikes reported in 2020. Globally, wildlife strikes killed more than 300 people and destroyed roughly 300 aircraft from 1988-2021. The administration has been researching new technology that could significantly reduce the chances of aircraft striking birds. It would give birds the warnings they need to fly out of the paths of oncoming airplanes and helicopters. Sarah McQuaide, communications and media relations manager for the Columbus Regional Airport Authority, which runs the John Glenn airport, said the authority's airport operations team conducts airfield inspections multiple times a day to identify and mitigate any risks, and a full-time wildlife specialist adds to the efforts. She said bird strikes there vary seasonally with bird activity and bird migration, adding that the most strikes occur during bird migration periods. CNN (4/24, McCluskey, Muntean), The Hill (4/24, Neukam), Scripps News (4/24, Packard) and WSYX (4/24, Bosco) provide additional coverage.

FAA Reports Airport Bird Strikes on the Rise

Spectrum News (4/24, Ferrante) reports that bird strikes are something that the Federal Aviation

Administration said have been on the rise. “Especially on departure, and when the aircraft are arriving to an airport,” said CEO and President of the nonprofit Flight Safety Foundation, Dr. Hassan Shahidi. He said bird strikes can create a real problem for pilots. “It can definitely cause a situation where you have a loss of thrust, loss of engine power,” said Shahidi. Aircrafts and birds share the same airspace, which is why Assistant Commissioner of Airport Operations at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport, Dejan Radosaeljevic, said Hopkins has an around the clock operation. “It’s a daily, hourly thing that we do all the time. You try to mitigate the risk as low as reasonably practicable, you know, but at the same time, it’s a risk that all our all airports have to deal with,” said Radosaeljevic.

He said Hopkins airport has technology in place such as air cannons, pyrotechnics and live traps, all to deter birds from flocking near the runways. “We also have our operations personnel which are out there continuously, doing patrols and perimeter checks,” said Radosaeljevic. “If they notice any flocks or anything of that nature, we go harass those.” However, harassment of the birds is a methodical process. “It’s also directing [the birds] out of the flight paths. We have certain areas that we really try to protect and keep as low, you know, keep free of any type of birds or mammals,” said Radosaeljevic. Keeping the birds out of the way of aircraft is something airports worldwide have to deal with. “Different regions have different types of issues with respect to this, respect to this species of the birds that are around that airport and the situation, the area around the airport. And each situation is different,” said Shahidi. The FAA has created a database that is accessible to the public and tracks every incident that occurs with bird strikes. So far this year in Ohio, 54 cases have been reported. WCMH (4/24, Halperin) provides additional coverage.

SpaceX Starship Explosion Spread Particulate Matter for Miles

CNBC (4/24, Kolodny) reports that SpaceX launched the largest rocket ever built for the first time on Thursday from its Boca Chica, Texas, spaceport. The Starship spacecraft, designed to fly people on a Mars mission someday, lifted off the launch pad then blew up in mid-flight, with no crew on board. Now, residents and researchers are scrambling to assess the impact of the explosion on local communities, their health, habitat and wildlife including endangered species. Of primary concern is the large amount of sand- and ash-like particulate matter and heavier debris kicked up by the launch. The particulate emissions spread far beyond the expected debris field. As a result of the explosion, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) grounded the company’s Starship Super Heavy launch program pending results of a “mishap investigation,” part of standard practice, according to an email from the agency sent to CNBC after the launch. No injuries or public property damage had yet been reported to the agency as of Friday. SpaceX did not immediately return a request for comment.

SpaceX CEO Elon Musk, speaking publicly on Twitter Spaces on April 16 ahead of the test flight, acknowledged that a vehicle with 33 engines is akin to “a box of grenades,” and that the Starship vehicle was not likely to reach orbit but was likely to explode. However, Musk and SpaceX did not accurately predict that their launchpad would be destroyed, nor that particulate matter would rain down on residents and habitat as far away as Port Isabel, a town about six miles from the launchpad, and South Padre Island, a few miles up the coast from the site. Images captured during the test flight show that the SpaceX launch pad also exploded, with concrete chunks from it flying in multiple directions leaving behind a giant crater underneath. According to Dave Cortez, the Lone Star chapter director for the Sierra Club, a 501c4 environmental advocacy group, “Concrete shot out into the ocean, and risked hitting the fuel storage tanks which are these silos adjacent to the launch pad.”

Jared Margolis, senior attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity, said that in an environmental assessment – which SpaceX completed to obtain a launch license – the company told the FAA and other agencies that in the event of an “anomaly” they expected debris would fall within a limited, 700-acre area surrounding the launch site. That would translate to a one-square-mile debris field, with debris

emanating about three-quarters of a mile away from the site, he said, referencing SpaceX environmental site assessment documents that are public record. In reality, following the test flight and explosion, people in Port Isabel reported broken windows in their businesses, shaking windows at their homes, and dust and particulate matter that coated their homes, schools and land unexpectedly, according to Cortez. Port Isabel is a mainland town near the SpaceX spaceport, and across from the South Padre Island offshore, which also got a share of particulate matter, according to correspondence between researchers and residents shared with CNBC. It's not yet known whether the ash- and sand-like particulate matter is dangerous to touch or breathe in and what effect it could have on soil health, Cortez and Margolis both noted.

The impacts of particulate emissions from the SpaceX launch won't be understood until samples are evaluated and the debris field measured comprehensively. But in general, particulate emissions are regulated under the federal Clean Air Act and Texas state law. Eric Roesch, an environmental engineer who has been tracking the impact of SpaceX facilities and launches on his blog, ESGHound, said that particulate emissions are associated with pulmonary and respiratory issues, and are considered a high priority pollutant by the EPA. Health impacts depend upon exposure time and quantity, as well as particle size, and contents of the particulate, he added. Roesch has been warning the public for months that the FAA and SpaceX had not been careful enough in their environmental analysis to comfortably proceed with a launch of this magnitude. He said, "The possibility of a widely dispersed plume of emissions was not disclosed by the FAA or SpaceX, during the initial environmental permitting and approval process." Margolis and Cortez both noted that roads had been damaged, with gates and cordons closed immediately following the SpaceX Starship test flight. That meant wildlife biologists and other field researchers could not immediately pass through to study the full scale of any damage that occurred in a nearby wildlife refuge area – though some were reportedly on location by Saturday April 22. One concern is that evidence of harm to endangered species could be removed from the site before regulators have an opportunity to assess it, Margolis said.

CNBC asked the FAA what it will take for SpaceX to be authorized to conduct another test flight or launch of the Starship Super Heavy vehicle from Boca Chica, Texas. The agency said in an email that a return to flight for the Starship Super Heavy will require the FAA to decide that "any system, process, or procedure related to the mishap does not affect public safety." Because they are still gathering information, the FAA and the Texas regional office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service were not able to answer questions yet about any environmental impacts of the Thursday launch. SpaceX did not respond to a request for comment. However, the FAA told CNBC via e-mail that the explosion activated something called an "anomaly response plan," which is part of a 2022 Programmatic Environmental Assessment completed by the company along with state and federal agencies, and that SpaceX has additional "environmental mitigations" they must complete before launching again. The plan "was triggered by debris entering adjacent properties," the FAA noted. After completing the list of tasks in the plan and mitigations SpaceX will need to ask the FAA to amend their launch license, to gain clearance for another test flight. The Center for Biological Diversity attorney, Jared Margolis, believes the FAA requirements will be minimal and easy for the company to fulfill, but not ultimately effective in safeguarding local residents' wellbeing and endangered species. He explained, "We are not against space exploration or this company. But while we are looking to the stars, we should not readily sacrifice communities, habitat and species." Time (4/24, Kluger), Gizmodo (4/24, Leffer), Quartz (4/24, Fernholz), KVBC (4/24, Yañez) and Houston Press (4/24, Wray) provide additional coverage.

Rio Grande Valley Groups Fight to Keep SpaceX Non-Disclosure Agreements Private

Texas Public Radio (4/24, Sheridan) reports that the world watched Thursday as the SpaceX rocket Starship/Superheavy, a vehicle built to one day deliver the materials for colonization on Mars, failed to

separate from its 33-engine Super Heavy booster. Starship exploded in mid-air miles above Boca Chica Beach and federally protected refuge lands. SpaceX has drawn ire from residents troubled by skyrocketing housing costs, blocked access to public lands, and launch-related safety and environmental concerns. The seemingly opaque relationships between local officials and Elon Musk's companies have also produced criticism. Texas Public Information Act (TPIA) requests reveal that not only have public entities in Cameron County signed non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) with SpaceX, but those entities have also sought to keep those NDAs private despite ongoing relationships with the company. Two NDAs, one signed by the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in April 2020 and another by the Brownsville Public Utilities Board (BPUB) in March 2017, were released only after the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) in Texas ordered them to become public. The city of Brownsville is currently fighting the release of any SpaceX-related NDAs. Cameron County previously acknowledged the existence of an NDA with SpaceX. However, that NDA was never released and has since disappeared.

SpaceX Wins Approval to Add Fifth U.S. Rocket Launch Site

Reuters (4/24, Roulette) reports that the U.S. Space Force said on Monday that Elon Musk's SpaceX was granted approval to lease a second rocket launch complex at a military base in California, setting the space company up for its fifth launch site in the United States. Under the lease, SpaceX will launch its workhorse Falcon rockets from Space Launch Complex-6 at Vandenberg Space Force Base, a military launch site north of Los Angeles where the space company operates another launchpad. It has two others in Florida and its private Starbase site in south Texas. A Monday night Space Force statement said a letter of support for the decision was signed on Friday by Space Launch Delta 30 commander Col. Rob Long. The statement did not mention a duration of SpaceX's lease. The new launch site, vacated last year by the Boeing-Lockheed joint venture United Launch Alliance, gives SpaceX more room to handle an increasingly busy launch schedule for commercial, government and internal satellite launches. Vandenberg Space Force Base allows for launches in a southern trajectory over the Pacific ocean, which is often used for weather-monitoring, military or spy satellites that commonly rely on polar Earth orbits. SpaceX's grant of Space Launch Complex-6 comes as rocket companies prepare to compete for the Pentagon's Phase 3 National Security Space Launch program, a watershed military launch procurement effort expected to begin in the next year or so.

California: Electric Autonomous Drones Get Approval to Spray California Crops

Bloomberg (4/24, Hirtzer) reports that farm fields in California's Central Valley soon will be managed by crop-spraying autonomous drones after Guardian Agriculture received approval from the Federal Aviation Administration to deploy its machines. Use of drones on farms has been surging but Guardian is the first to get authorization in the US to commercially operate so-called eVTOL aircraft, which are electric and take off and land vertically. Demand for the drones is so strong that Guardian is booking orders for late-2025, said Adam Bercu, cofounder and chief executive officer and a one-time Battlebots competitor. "We'll be bottlenecked by manufacturing capacity for years," Bercu said of his drone factory outside of Boston. "We're turning folks down." Drones can more easily be deployed than helicopters and planes on some farm fields and, unlike traditional ground-based crop sprayers, they don't compact soil or run over plants. A lack of pilots in the industry also is prompting operators to turn to drones, according to Willie Negroni, vice president of supplier relations at Wilbur-Ellis, which will be among the first to deploy Guardian's drones in California. Electrek (4/24, Johnson) provides additional coverage.

Women Are Less Than 3% of Aviation Maintenance Technicians. Why?

Dallas Morning News (4/24, Skores) reports that Jennifer Morgan's day at work at Southwest Airlines includes strapping herself to a harness and standing on top of a Boeing 737. She does it while sporting her signature tall blonde hair and a Southwest blue button-up shirt. The 52-year-old is known as "Powder" to her colleagues — almost all of whom are men. She's an inspector for Southwest's technical

operation and she sees herself as one of the guys. "Everybody treats you, even if you're older than them, they treat you like a little sister," Morgan said. "They always check on you. Not that I need to be checked on. There's no animosity as you would think in a lot of fields." In a career that sees the least amount of women representation for the aviation industry, of all aircraft maintenance technicians, women only make up 2.6% of the field, according to Women in Aviation International. The advocacy group's 2022 recommendations report said that Boeing forecast over the next 20 years, 626,000 maintenance technicians will be needed worldwide. Maintenance technicians are often the people behind the scenes, diagnosing mechanical and technical issues of different aircraft. On a perfect day, according to Stacey Rudser, president of the Association for Women in Aviation Maintenance, the job is designed to be invisible. Most of the work is done at night when planes are grounded, Rudser said. "If there's something we need to resolve on a flight, usually a passenger can't really see us, like changing a tire on certain types of aircraft," Rudser said, noting the career's visibility problem. "You and the passengers aren't gonna see that." Rudser said the job goes unnoticed, where it has become easier to point young girls to more visible careers such as pilots or engineers. It's a profession that is still seen as blue-collar when Rudser would rather think of it as "gray-collar," based on how sophisticated the aircraft maintenance technicians' work has become. Aviation is a culture that hasn't quite caught up to be a welcoming environment for women, Rudser said, but the work being done now is more than it has ever been before.

Northern Mariana Islands, Guam: Governor Discusses Airports Woes with FAA on Guam

Marianas Variety (4/24, Erdiano) reports that Governor Arnold I. Palacios said he was given last week an opportunity to discuss with Federal Aviation Administration officials some pressing issues regarding CNMI airports. He was invited to the Aerodrome Certification Workshop hosted by the FAA from April 18 to 21 at Westin Resort on Guam. He left Saipan on Wednesday, April 19, and was back the next day, Thursday, April 20. Among the FAA officials who were on Guam for the workshop were FAA Western Pacific Region Airport Division Director Mark McClardy, FAA Airport District Office Manager Gordon Wong, FAA Technical Operations Manager Victoria Wei and FAA Foreign Affairs Specialist Paul Devoti. Guam Gov. Lourdes A. Leon Guerrero delivered the welcoming remarks. Also participating in the event were Commonwealth Ports Authority Board Chairwoman Kimberlyn King-Hinds and CPA Deputy Executive Director Ed Mendiola who discussed the situation of the airports on Saipan, Tinian and Rota. It was the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic that FAA and regional ports authority officials had an opportunity to meet face to face. Governor Palacios said the FAA officials invited him to sit down with them. He said he shared his thoughts on CNMI ports issues, and the need to fast-track ongoing infrastructure projects and repairs in all Commonwealth airports, particularly on Rota and Saipan. These include the ongoing construction project at the Saipan commuter terminal, the need to improve the control tower, and the runway repair project that will "ensure that we don't have any interruptions on our flights here." He said he had a "very robust" two-hour meeting with the FAA officials. The governor said he also talked with United Airlines executives and expressed concern regarding airfare. He said airline officials were very "empathetic," and told him that they would bring his concern to United Airlines headquarters. The governor said they also talked about a Narita-Saipan flight service as the CNMI moves forward in reinvigorating the Japan tourism market.

New York, New Jersey: As Deal Pushes Helicopters Away from Statue of Liberty, Will Noise Disrupt NJ Suburbs?

Northjersey.com (4/24, Wilson) reports that as the latest U.S. Supreme Court battle between New York and New Jersey comes to an end and as the Rangers and Devils face off in the first round of the NHL playoffs, there is one issue folks on both sides of the Hudson River are aligned on: helicopters. Eight U.S. senators and members of Congress from both states have sent a letter to the Federal Aviation

Administration and the National Park Service to air grievances about new agreements regarding helicopter movements. The agreements with private tour and charter helicopter companies were struck to limit how close helicopters could fly to Liberty Island, Ellis Island and Governors Island, non-residential tourist sites. But as a result, the helicopter traffic — and accompanying noise pollution and disruption — will likely be pushed toward residential areas of the two states. “Much of Liberty State Park, Lower Manhattan, and the areas of Brooklyn adjacent to Governors Island were left unprotected,” the letter said. “In fact, the buffer zones around the National Monuments stand to push flight traffic closer to Liberty State Park and New Jersey’s waterfront area.”

Meanwhile, in Washington, D.C., the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, which includes Menendez, this week held its “Member Day,” in which House members can make requests to committees they’re not on regarding issues affecting their districts during budget season. “I am seeking relief for those northern New Jersey constituents who are having their lives disrupted by pervasive noise that is reportedly coming from helicopters flying close to our neighborhoods at various hours of the day and night,” Pascrell told the committee. The FAA did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Menendez said the helicopter issue is a priority of the committee as it considers the FAA reauthorization. U.S. Rep. Don Beyer, D-Va., also used the reauthorization process to address constituent complaints about military helicopters flying over his district in northern Virginia. That ultimately led to a GAO study, and the FAA piloted a program last year that created a way to collect and share helicopter noise complaints, which wasn’t being done before. Menendez also introduced a bill that would require the FAA and National Park Service to take into consideration the broader effects of voluntary agreements like the ones recently reached for helicopters flying near the national monuments in New York City. “We’re trying to approach it from every angle that we can,” Menendez said. “Until we get the outcomes our constituents deserve, we’re going to be relentless in this pursuit.”

Boeing Investors Seek Answers After Latest 737 Production Glitch

Reuters (4/24, Isinna) reports that Boeing is expected to reveal whether the latest 737 MAX manufacturing problem will derail the U.S. plane maker’s annual goals for passenger jet deliveries and free cash flow when it unveils its first quarter financial results on Wednesday. Investors are clamoring for details on the extent of the problem, which Boeing said involves a “significant” portion of the 737 fleet where two brackets were improperly installed. Analysts said the manufacturing problem isn’t a showstopper for the MAX, as it’s not a safety issue and in-service jets have continued to fly. But Wall Street has received little information from Boeing on its plan to fix the problem and the overall financial impact. “I’d like to have some numbers and some scale of the materiality of this, whether it affects deliveries, cash flow and all the rest,” Vertical Research Partners analyst Robert Stallard said. “It’s unfortunately just one of many issues that Boeing seems to stumble into on a regular basis.”

The biggest question is whether Boeing will update its 2023 financial guidance, which calls for it to deliver at least 400 737 MAXs and generate \$3 billion to \$5 billion in free cash flow this year. Both goals may still be achievable, said J.P. Morgan analyst Seth Seifman. “Boeing gave a fairly wide range for the amount of cash flow they expect for the year, and there are a lot of levers to impact cash throughout the company,” said Seifman, who said it would be “surprising” if the company were unable to meet its goal. While it’s “more likely” that Boeing would lower 737 MAX delivery projections, the company has already delivered 111 MAXs in its first quarter -- typically the slowest financial quarter of the year -- and could meet its annual goal so long as rework can be accomplished quickly, Seifman said. Investors may also press Boeing CEO Dave Calhoun about the number of MAXs impacted by the problem, the cost and timeline for a fix.

Southwest Airlines Meteorologists Reach Tentative Contract Deal with Dallas Carrier

Dallas Morning News (4/24, Skores) reports that meteorologists at Southwest Airlines reached a tentative agreement on Monday with the Dallas-based carrier. Southwest's meteorologists, represented by Transport Workers Union 550, become the ninth employee group to reach a deal with the company. The airline employs about a dozen weather experts. Unions representing the airline's three biggest employee groups –pilots, flight attendants and ramp and cargo workers – are still in contract talks or discussions with a federal mediator. "This agreement rewards our meteorologists for their expertise and many contributions to our business," said Adam Carlisle, vice president of labor relations at Southwest Airlines in a statement. "I appreciate the hard work from both negotiating teams to reach an agreement for employees to vote on." Contract details weren't disclosed. The union said it will share that information and the voting process with its members. "The board of TWU 550 would like to thank the negotiating committees of both parties for their hard work and diligence to provide our meteorologists with this tentative agreement," said union president Brian Brown. "Together, these teams produced a collective bargaining agreement that provides our members with competitive wages, quality of life improvements and vital job security measures that will benefit our professional meteorologists for years to come." Southwest is in mediation with Transport Workers Union Local 556, which represents about 18,000 flight attendants, and the Southwest Airlines Pilots' Association, which bargains for about 9,000 pilots. The company is also negotiating with Transport Workers Union Local 555, which represents some 15,000 ramp, operations, provisioning and cargo agents.

US Airlines Plot a Course Away from Another Costly Summer of Chaos

Financial Times (4/24, Bushey) reports that the past two summers saw air travel nightmares across the US as airlines struggled to restore operations brutally curtailed by a global pandemic. With much to prove, industry executives are promising that this time will be different. A quarter of US flights were cancelled or delayed last summer, leaving travelers fuming in airports across the country. The chaos has prompted the White House and some legislators to call for tighter regulation to minimize fees and disruptions. As the big US airlines prepare for peak season, American Airlines chief operating officer David Seymour told the Financial Times the carrier had been working since autumn to build "resilience" into its summer schedule to be ready for commercial flying's unexpected challenges. After determining how many people it could reasonably expect to hire and train, he said, "we built a schedule that we knew we could fly". Delta Air Lines has trimmed its flight plans by 2 per cent to preserve operational reliability, while United Airlines' head of operations said the company had "already done that" and was "ahead of the curve".

All three carriers have cut some New York flights because there are too few air traffic controllers to manage the region's congested airspace. "The stakes are always high in the summer," Seymour said. "People want to get back to travel, and they don't want to have another experience [like] they had last summer." Summer tests operations at US airlines because it combines higher volumes of flights and passengers with the possibility of thunderstorms, wildfires, hurricanes and extreme heat. The season, said United chief operating officer Torbjorn "Toby" Enqvist, "is our Super Bowl". The tough conditions mean airlines need slack in the system to recover when bad weather strikes. That slack, whether it takes the form of extra crew on standby, emptier planes or longer times to complete a flight, drives up costs, either leading to higher fares or hurting profits. Airlines must balance the need to operate smoothly against the need to cut costs, said Citi analyst Stephen Trent. The risk lies in cutting too far. WTOP (4/24, Domen) provides additional coverage.

Delta Could Bump Even More People Off Flights as It Looks to Increase 'Overbooking' to Wring Out More Profits

Business Insider (4/24, Green) reports that Glen Hauenstein, president of Delta, said the airline would look at increasing its overbooking rate. It's part of a new revenue management scheme designed to adapt to post-pandemic era travel. Overbooking is a common practice in the airline industry and comes

with both risk and rewards. The US Department of Transportation lays out specific rules for oversold flights. Airlines must first ask for volunteers to give up seats before involuntarily bumping passengers. Legally, there is no limit to what airlines can offer volunteers as compensation, but the DOT lays out specific minimums and caps for involuntary bumping. The new overbooking scheme likely means Delta feels more confident in its ability to predict post-pandemic passenger behavior now after a year or two of studying the trends of business and leisure travel. "We now have the real post-pandemic travel patterns which are very different in terms of cities that people fly to and places they want to go," Hauenstein said, adding that the airline is now using those recent patterns in its analysis of not only when to overbook flights and by how much, but where to add more or bigger planes to carry more passengers.

DOJ Joins Investigation of Southwest's Holiday Flight Meltdown: Was Schedule 'Unrealistic'?

ABC (4/24, McMichael) reports that the Department of Justice has joined an investigation led by the Department of Transportation into Southwest Airlines' meltdown in December -- when the company canceled more than 16,000 flights over an 11-day period -- a DOT spokesperson said. The DOT's probe is looking into "whether Southwest engaged in unrealistic flight scheduling which is illegal under federal law and whether Southwest Airlines provided timely refunds and reimbursements to affected passengers as required," the agency spokesperson said in a statement. "The DOT team ... is also closely coordinating with DOJ and FAA," the spokesperson said. In a statement, Southwest said it has not received any inquiries yet from the DOJ but is ready to cooperate with the government agencies. Southwest's extensive cancellations left thousands of passengers stranded as a result of severe winter storms, staffing shortages and technology issues. The airline said the breakdown cost more than \$800 million in revenue in the fourth quarter of 2022. At the time, Southwest's CEO Bob Jordan apologized for the chaos during an interview with ABC News, saying, "This has impacted so many people, so many customers over the holidays, it's impacted our employees and I'm extremely sorry for that. There's just no way, almost, to apologize enough."

In January, the DOT announced that it was investigating and in a February hearing, the company's COO, Andrew Watterson, addressed the cancellations before the Senate Commerce Committee. "Let me be clear: We messed up," Watterson said. "In hindsight, we did not have enough winter operational resilience." In March, Southwest unveiled a three-part plan to boost the airline's operational resiliency in the face of future challenges. But problems have persisted: Last week, Southwest planes were briefly grounded nationwide and more than 2,000 flights were delayed as a result of a technical issue with an internal system. "This is another demonstration that Southwest Airlines needs to upgrade their systems and stop the negative impacts to individual travelers," Washington Sen. Maria Cantwell, chair of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, said in a statement at the time.

Connecticut: Avelo CEO Vows Changes After 'a Very Painful Three Days' Rocks the Airline

An opinion piece in CT Insider (4/24, Haar) argues that a week after Avelo Airlines diverted seven planes to Delaware from their intended landings at Tweed New Haven Airport, Andrew Levy is still studying complaints from hundreds of angry customers. He's still sorting out what happened in those three nights of heavy fog. This much he knows as founder and CEO of the startup airline and a longtime industry veteran: "Could we have managed it better? Absolutely, 100 percent yes," Levy said. "There are a lot of lessons we are learning. This was a very painful three days." Levy, in a conversation with me late Friday, vowed that Avelo would improve — even before the airline figures out how, exactly, it will change the way it handles adverse events. "We very much acknowledge that we could have and should have and will do much better in the future," Levy told me. The interview has been his only public statement since

New Haven-bound Avelo jetliners failed to land at Tweed four times on Saturday, April 15; three times the next day, Sunday; and twice on Monday the 17th. Two of those diverted 737 aircraft on Sunday landed at Bradley International Airport. The other seven flights diverted to Wilmington, Del., where Avelo has operations. Levy is following the difficult path of CEOs who come clean about their companies' shortcomings in a crisis. He's reacting to customers unhappy about chaos, confusion and lost days in the cascading events.

Ohio: NASA Glenn Research Could Help Speed Up Commercial Air Travel

WIW (4/24, Bovenzi) reports that fifty years ago, the Federal Aviation Administration banned supersonic commercial travel over land. Today, the NASA Glenn Research Center is helping to create a runway to faster travel times in the US. The Quesst Mission aims to change the rules for supersonic travel thanks to the creation of the X-59. "The X-59 is what we call an X plane. It's a one-of-a-kind aircraft that NASA is building just to collect data so that the FAA and international regulators can help make a new rule for supersonic flight over land based on the quiet noise it will make," said Ray Castner, NASA Propulsion Lead for Quesst Mission. "With any luck, you'll barely even hear it." A sonic boom registers at about 110 decibels. That's the equivalent of a balloon being popped. The X-59 is set out to lower the sonic boom to 75 decibels, which is the sound of a car door slam from 20 feet away. "Traditional sonic boom, it was a very loud, short duration, startling sound," Castner said. "This sound is more of a thump. I've definitely heard that in the simulators, and it is very similar to being outdoors and hearing a car door slam, instead of a house-shaking boom." A model of the X-59 was tested in Cleveland in NASA Glenn's supersonic wind tunnel, now it's being built in Palmdale, California. "I like to say the road to building the X-59 has come through Cleveland. Obviously we're proud of the facilities here," Castner said. "We're proud of being able to build an X plane and fly around and demonstrate reduced sonic boom." Once it's deemed safe for flight, it will start flying over cities to collect data to deem if the new lowered sonic boom impacts people. If all works out, it could change how we travel decades from now. "We want to be able to fly New York to LA in two, to two and a half hours instead of four to six hours like it takes right now," Castner said. "The biggest barrier to flying over land is the sonic boom that a supersonic aircraft makes."

Plus-Size Traveler Demands Additional Seating and Better Airline Accommodations

Travel Noire (4/24, Braga) reports that Jae'lynn Chaney, a plus-size travel blogger based in Vancouver, Washington, has long campaigned for more accommodating airline policies toward passengers of larger sizes. The plus-size traveler has now taken a new step. She has just launched a Change.org petition demanding that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reevaluate its position on the issue. The petition has received more than 8,000 signatures so far. Chaney initiated the petition after she and her fiancé, a Colorado resident, claimed they were discriminated against during a recent, 2-hour flight from Pasco, Washington, to Denver. According to Chaney, other passengers refused to sit next to them. She said they were subjected to "hateful comments" and "disapproving looks" as a result. Chaney also claims the airline's failure to accommodate her size has caused her "pain and vulnerability." Chaney also wants "additional airport assistance," such as help with a wheelchair and priority boarding. In the petition, she also asks airlines to give their employees the training they need to handle "sensitive situations" and give "appropriate customer service." In addition to the airlines and FAA, Chaney has also given the TSA a piece of her mind in the petition about how they could better accommodate overweight passengers. "The TSA should implement clear guidelines for screening plus-size travelers, train agents on how to respectfully interact with plus-size travelers, offer sensitivity training, and provide accessible screening equipment," she wrote.

Virginia: How Loudoun Co. Hopes to Reduce Noise from Dulles Airport's Flight Paths at Nearby Homes

WTOP (4/24, Augenstein) reports that Loudoun County, Virginia leaders recently tweaked noise maps

around Dulles International Airport to determine where homes can and can't be built in the future — some already living near the airport are asking, 'What about us?' In January 2023, the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors adopted the new zoning map for future homes after conducting noise studies. However, some homeowners in the new Birchwood at Brambleton development say planes taking off on east-west Runway 30 fly over their homes with jet engines at full power. Loudoun County will hire an aviation consultant to develop suggestions and aid the county in working with the Federal Aviation Administration and Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority to reduce noise near the airport, including lobbying for changed flight paths. Construction began at Birchwood at Brambleton near the start of the pandemic, which resulted in large decrease in flights.

However, neighbors say they're being affected by the growing number of flights taking off and landing on the airport's sole east-west runway. To avoid confusion, runway numbers are based on the compass direction. For example, Runway 30 and Runway 12 are the same runway, but flights taking off to the west use Runway 30 and flights heading east use Runway 12. County officials hope a trained aviation consultant will help coordinate engagement with the FAA and MWAA on the airport noise issue, including, "Baseline airport noise computer modeling to isolate the noise conditions to/from Runway 30 from the remainder of the airport." Having the information could help in lobbying with the FAA and airports authority for changing the flight paths of jets: "Development and modeling to identify incremental changes in noise conditions for Runway 30 for various scenario departure rule modifications," according to the Board of Supervisors staff report.

Ohio: City Picks Consulting Team to Analyze Economics of Closing, Redeveloping Burke Lakefront Airport

Cleveland Plain Dealer (4/24, Litt) reports that Clevelanders have been debating for decades about whether to close Burke Lakefront Airport and redevelop its 445 acres as a park or an expansion of downtown. Fulfilling a pledge he made during his 2021 campaign, Mayor Justin Bibb is now positioning the city to give that question a serious look. The administration announced Monday it is recommending a team led by Econsult Solutions of Philadelphia to perform a four-month, \$115,000 study on the potential of repurposing Burke. Jeff Epstein, the city's chief of integrated development, said Monday the administration will seek authority from City Council to proceed with the study, which could start as soon as May. Versed in the economics of airports and waterfronts, and in local planning issues, the team includes Washington, D.C.-based Riddle Inc., a woman-owned real estate and economic development marketing firm; and Cleveland-based Robert P. Madison International, Inc., the largest Black female-owned architecture firm in Ohio.

Epstein called the study an "order of magnitude" analysis aimed at comparing the airport's economic impact with other potential uses of its land including as a park or a dense urban development. The new study is a companion effort to a separate analysis of Burke launched by the city in 2021 that was expanded in 2022 to look at the aviation and regulatory implications of closing Burke. The city is preparing the analysis for inclusion in a document called an Airport Layout Plan, required by the Federal Aviation Administration. Bonnie Teeuwen, the city's chief operating officer, said the findings of the Burke aviation and regulatory study, now in draft form, will be presented to the FAA for its comments later this year, and will likely be completed around the same time as the economic analysis. "No decision has been made one way or another whether we're closing Burke," Teeuwen said. "We just want to make sure we have all of our data up to date so we can make an informed decision. Both of these documents will help with this decision." The Burke studies are part of the city's latest efforts to figure out how to capitalize on its proximity to Lake Erie.

Arkansas: Sky Is the Limit for 3 Arkansas Licensed Pilots Still in High School

KARK (4/24, Hampton) reports that with some high school students trying to get their driver's license,

others are looking not just to take to the road but to the sky. Three Cabot High School students have all gained their pilot license, reaching incredible achievements and hoping to continue making milestones in the air. 17-year-old Baron Gilliam said flying comes naturally to him. "I flew a plane by myself before I could drive a car by myself," Gilliam said. Gilliam says he has logged 250 hours so far in the sky, he secured his private pilot license last year on his birthday when he turned 17-years-old, and months later he obtained another pilot qualification. "I soloed my 16th birthday and then on my 17th I got my full license and a couple of months after I got my instrument rating," Gilliam said. The instrument rating earned him a letter from the Little Rock Federal Aviation Administration giving Gilliam the Little Rock FSDO Coin of Excellence, it says in part: "It is rare that a young person like yourself puts in the work necessary to reach incredible milestones in aviation. Very few people have achieved the privilege of obtaining their private pilot certificate on their 17 birthday. Fewer people have built upon their experience and obtained their instrument rating less than 5 months later. I hope that you continue to grow and gain invaluable experience as an aviator. I hope that your drive and dedication to learn continues as well."

Vermont: Caledonia Aviation Community Optimistic About Proposed Airport Sale

VT Digger (4/24, Robinson) reports that a group of pilots at the Caledonia County State Airport expressed measured optimism Monday evening over a state proposal to sell the airport to a private company — though transportation officials still haven't shared many concrete details about the plan. Transportation Secretary Joe Flynn said last week that Beta Technologies, the South Burlington electric aircraft manufacturer, has expressed interest in taking the Lyndon airport off the state's hands. The agency is seeking approval from the Legislature to sell the facility, a request lawmakers may grant in this year's omnibus transportation bill. On Monday, state transportation officials met with local residents inside the airport's terminal building to garner comments on the plan. About two dozen people turned out for the meeting, including a number of current and former state lawmakers. Top of mind for many of the pilots were assurances that the local aviation community could continue to operate at the facility as it has for decades, should it no longer receive funding from the state and federal governments. Many agreed with state officials that, at the same time, the sale could be a good opportunity for them and their neighbors. "We need real guarantees," said Robert Jauch, who owns a hangar at the airport. "Because this would be great for the community." Dan Delabruere, director of aviation and rail at the transportation agency, told Jauch and others that the state would negotiate an agreement with a new private owner ensuring continued public access to the airport. The new owner also would have to honor any existing leases at the time of sale, he said. But state officials said they could not answer questions about how airport operations would look different under a private owner, and Flynn declined to share details on Beta's proposed plans when asked by the local pilots.

Florida: Naples Airport Holding Disaster Preparedness Exercise Tuesday

Naples Daily News (4/24, Little) reports that usually ambulances, fire trucks, and police cars crowding an airport indicates trouble. But on Tuesday morning, first responders won't be at Naples Airport for a real emergency. Every few years, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requires airports to host an exercise testing how first responders would handle a disaster involving a plane crash. Naples Airport will set up a plane crash simulation to test local agencies' response to an aviation disaster — it's called Operation Mutual Response. "Very few people know the actual details of the actual scenario because it's supposed to test how you'd actually react," Naples Airport Authority Community Engagement Manager Zac Burch said. The goal is to utilize and test the FAA Mass Casualty Incident Standard Operating Guidelines that first responders are supposed to follow when responding to a disaster. "It's also important because it really not only applies to something that could happen at the airport," Burch said. "It could be a tornado, it could be an active shooter, or something like that, where all these agencies are going to have to work together on some major incident."

Texas: McKinney Residents to Decide on Multi-Million Dollar Bond Package for Airport Expansion

KTVU (4/24, Jones) reports that McKinney residents are deciding whether to approve a multi-million-dollar bond package that would fund a big portion of the city's airport expansion plan and bring commercial travel to the area. Tonight, Mayor George Fuller hosted a question-and-answer session. Residents learned more about the \$200 million dollar bond package on the ballot. "I fear residents are making a decision, potentially making a decision, not based in fact, but misinformation," Fuller said. "Frisco has Universal Studios, the Cowboys, that's not the kind of development we want," resident Al Perry said. "This is the secret sauce." "I am completely against it," resident Lee Moore said. "I think that the numbers don't add up in any way, shape, or form." The bond would fund most of the city's airport expansion plan. At first, opening four new gates, a new taxi way and parking. Mayor Fuller estimates in its first year, it would operate about 12 commercial flights a day. "There's going to be service out of there anyway, and I think we should take advantage of it," resident Tim Lowe said. Some who live nearby are worried about traffic, noise and pollution, especially given there's the possibility of future expansion up to 16 gates. "The FAA then reviews that environmental assessment," he said. "All those things have to be acceptable. On traffic, we're talking about 1,000 cars a day. We're about to open an HEB with about 25,000 people on a given Saturday." Fuller said the info has been made public on FlyMcKinney.com. If passed, city officials say this expansion could bring more than 2,000 jobs to the area and more than \$600 million in economic impact.

New Jersey: United Airlines Flight to Israel Turns Back After Passenger Gets into a Shouting Match with Crew

New York Post (4/24, Reyes) reports that a United Airlines flight bound for Israel landed back in Newark after a passenger got into a shouting match with crew members. The "disruptive passenger" was on Flight 90, which departed from Newark Liberty International Airport on Sunday morning. But the plane made a U-turn about three hours into the 10-hour trip, the airline confirmed. An eyewitness told the Israeli media outlet Ynet that the unidentified man wanted to use the bathroom and chose to wait in a seat assigned to crew members only. When a flight attendant chastised him, the man got into a shouting match with the employee, who threatened to turn the plane around. The man appeared not to believe the warning, the witness said. Video from a fellow passenger shows the moment the unidentified man, wearing a black turtleneck, was escorted out of the plane. A follow-up video shows the man talking about the incident with a group of people back at the Newark airport. United Airlines confirmed that the flight was halted over the man's unruly behavior and that he was removed by law enforcement. The airline did not immediately respond to The Post's additional request for information on the incident. The disruption ultimately canceled the flight on Sunday, leaving passengers stuck in New Jersey waiting for the rescheduled flight.

Florida: Small Plane Crashes on Golf Course Near Wellington, Sending Pilot to Trauma Center

Palm Beach Post (4/24, Wingham) reports that a small plane crashed Monday morning at a golf course near Wellington, sending one person to a trauma hospital, Palm Beach County Fire Rescue reported. Both the agency and the Federal Aviation Administration are investigating the crash, which took place at about 10:30 a.m. at Baynan Golf Club on the 1300 block of Lyons Road, north of Forest Hill Boulevard and east of State Road 7. The FAA said a single-engine Thatcher CX4 crashed with only the pilot on board. The pilot was able to climb out of the aircraft before paramedics arrived, said Capt. Thomas Reyes, spokesperson for Fire Rescue. Neither agency provided a description of the pilot. WPEC (4/24, Detman) and WPIG (4/24, Gothner) provide additional coverage.

Texas: Pilot Airlifted to Hospital After Small Plane Crashes at La Porte Airport

Houston Chronicle (4/24, Orozco, deGrood) reports that a pilot was airlifted for medical treatment Monday morning after a small single-engine aircraft crashed at La Porte's municipal airport, authorities reported. The pilot, who was the only occupant of the plane, was flown by Life Flight air ambulance to Memorial Hermann-Texas Medical Center after first responders arrived on the scene around 8:50 a.m., according to Johnny Morales, emergency management coordinator for the city of La Porte. No other injuries were reported. Information on the identity and condition of the pilot was not immediately available. The plane, owned by a Beeville pipeline surveying company, was approaching the airport to land when the crash occurred, Morales said. The crash did not result in fire or explosions, but La Porte Fire Department worked to address fumes coming from the plane, he said. Air-quality readings indicated no risk to the community, Morales said. The crash is being investigated by the Federal Aviation Administration and the Texas Department of Public Safety.

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Federal Highway Administration

Maryland: Leaders Celebrate Funding for Removal of 'Highway to Nowhere'

WBAL (4/24, Amara) reports that leaders gathered at Baltimore's "highway to nowhere" Monday to celebrate efforts toward getting rid of the highway that divides west Baltimore. "This is a historic day here in west Baltimore," said Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott. The highway received its fair share of names at Monday's press conference. "This (is a) one-and-a-half-mile scar dividing west Baltimore," said U.S. Sen. Chris Van Hollen. "Where we stand was once a connected, thriving community that has been separated for decades as a result of this monstrosity," said U.S. Rep. Kweisi Mfume. The highway is now being accepted as a mistake made by the federal government, which is now working to repair the damage. "We are now going to turn the page," said Scott, "and turn it into, once again, a thriving neighborhood with public transportation, public parks, arts, all the (things) this neighborhood once held." The city was awarded a \$2 million grant through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment Act to figure out what happens after this 16-block, six-lane surface artery is dismantled. The funding is phase one of a \$4 billion, five-year program, which Van Hollen fought to get written into the new law. "We are here because we are committed to seeing this through," he said. The process is community-driven, officials stressed Monday. They said they are hammering out details as money will arrive in a few months. This summer, leaders will release details on the stakeholder work group and how you can get involved. WMAR (4/24, Verner) and Afro News (4/24, McQueen) provide additional coverage.

Ohio: 'A Missed Opportunity': Former Mayors Cranley, Mallory Want Changes in Brent Spence Design

Cincinnati Enquirer (4/24, Newberry) reports that the Brent Spence Bridge project should be reconfigured to allow Cincinnati to reclaim and redevelop 30 acres near Downtown, according to two former mayors. In interviews Monday, John Cranley and Mark Mallory said they support the \$3.6 billion bridge project but think Cincinnati could recapture land lost decades ago to Interstate 75. As Ohio and Kentucky get ready to hire a contractor to complete official bridge plans, the city has a "once-in-a-generation opportunity" to open up and develop land west of downtown, said Cranley, a local attorney who served as mayor from 2013 to 2022. "It seems like a missed opportunity if we don't get that land back," he said. Cranley will put his support for a project pivot on the record Tuesday at a Cincinnati City Council committee meeting. He will join leaders of Bridge Forward, the group pushing for the 30-acre plan, to present "an alternate approach to the Brent Spence Bridge." Mallory, mayor from 2005 to 2013 and now a consultant on public-private partnerships, will not attend the City Hall meeting. But he's been assisting Bridge Forward for more than a year and thinks Cincinnati can create new landmarks if it reclaims the land. "How often does any city get 30 acres handed back, that creates an opportunity for redevelopment in the core of their city?" he asked.

Massachusetts: Opponents of Bike Lanes Are Back with an Analysis Showing the Safety Measures Cause More Injuries

Cambridge Day (4/24, Levy) reports that an opponent of the bike-lane network being installed citywide released an analysis Monday saying the lanes have caused injuries to increase, with “2.5 times more cyclists and 3.5 times [more] motorist injuries” occurring on three street segments where separated bike lanes were installed. The 14-page analysis uses publicly available police crash data, and “if anything, we’re undercounting injuries,” author John Hanratty said. It looks at 1.3 miles of protected bike lanes, where bicyclists are separated from car traffic by plastic flex-posts and other means. On those stretches, there were 19 more injuries from before Covid to after installation in 2022, or a 158 percent increase, the report says, resulting in what Hanratty called “a limp or having to go to the hospital.” Hanratty was part of a group called Cambridge Streets for All that filed a lawsuit last summer over the loss of parking space from the Cycling Safety Ordinance of 2019, which calls for 22.6 miles of bike lanes citywide. That lawsuit was rejected by a judge on March 27, but is being appealed. Other members of that group were on a closed call explaining the analysis, including Joan Pickett and John Pitkin, a former member of chair of the city’s Board of Traffic and Parking.

The report was sent Thursday to the City Council and Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department, the group said. A call was placed Monday to the department to see whether the report had been received and if officials there had comment, but there was no immediate reply. This report may be updated with staff or City Council comment. Though his field is business consulting, Hanratty said he “went to three or four experts” who approved of his analysis, and that the results were consistent with those in other cities such as Denver – that separated bike lanes led to more injuries. Bike advocates were contacted Monday and asked if they were aware of the findings. “It’s hard to directly evaluate this lengthy report without looking into the details of the data analysis further. However, its conclusions are at odds with professional consensus,” said Nate Fillmore, a co-founder of the Cambridge Bicycle Safety group. “Of relevance, the Federal Highway Administration just released a report on the safety of protected bike lanes” that included Cambridge and found that “quick-build” lanes such as those in use in Cambridge “cut the risk of crash in half compared to regular bike lanes,” Fillmore said. Denver is also included, according to a technical summary of the February report. That work was “conducted by professionals experienced with the data sources and methodology needed to correctly conduct a study of this sort,” Fillmore said, while he had concerns that the Cambridge Streets for All group was “amateurs with an agenda.”

Tennessee: TDOT Commissioner Eley Talks Transportation Modernization Act in Clarksville

Clarksville Now (4/24, Settle) reports that a visit to Clarksville late last week from Tennessee Department of Transportation Commissioner and Deputy Gov. Butch Eley helped regional government agency leaders conceptualize how key road projects and other transportation concerns fit into TDOT’s newly authorized Transportation Modernization Act. On his rounds across the state, Commissioner Eley paid a visit to the April monthly meeting of the Clarksville Urbanized Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The MPO, chaired by Clarksville Mayor Joe Pitts, is an organization of local governments and relevant federal, state and local transportation agencies and departments in Tennessee and Kentucky – with the principal focus being travel in Montgomery and Christian counties, and their respective municipalities. Commissioner Eley said the state will, through the Transportation Modernization Act, invest \$3.3 billion to accommodate Tennessee’s record growth, address traffic congestion, and meet transportation needs across rural and urban communities. “The important thing I would point out is that, of that \$3.3 billion, \$300 million goes directly to the counties,” Commissioner Eley said, noting that represents a 15 percent increase in state aid to counties in one year.

Connecticut: State Adopts New Exit Numbers for I-691. Here's Why.

Record-Journal (4/24, Godin) reports that the Department of Transportation began re-numbering the exits on Interstate 691 Monday as part of a larger, statewide effort to make exit numbers align with mile markers on the highways. For instance exit 8 at Broad Street in Meriden is now exit 2A, and exit 7 for downtown Meriden is now exit 2B. The old exit numbers will also remain on highway signs for the foreseeable future, according to the state Department of Transportation. The DOT announced that exit numbering would be revised on Interstate 691 both eastbound and westbound from Middlefield to Cheshire last month. The changes went into effect on Monday. The exit number changes on I-691 coincide with an ongoing project that includes resurfacing, drainage upgrades, guiderail replacement, minor bridge work, lighting upgrades, new traffic cameras and sign replacement. "The numbers are reversed," said city Economic Development Director Joseph Feest, who noticed the sign placement starting Sunday evening. But he noted, Cheshire to Middlefield are not the only towns impacted. Changes to exits on Route 9 were recently completed and more are expected statewide. He said the old exit numbers are paired with the new numbers along Route 9 and his GPS system has already recognized the new numbers. Delivery drivers and other businesses will likely rely on the old numbers until GPS catches up to the changes. "Let's hope they keep the old exit numbers up," Feest said. "Any change is always confusing. We went through that when we changed the lanes downtown. We are a society that's not used to change. It takes people time to change." The old exit numbers will remain in place, in addition to the new numbers, for a minimum of two years, according to the DOT website. The exits are being renumbered to mileage-based numbering to conform to federal standards as part of a multi-year effort on all of the state's highways.

Tennessee: Traffic to the Smokies Keeps Increasing. Is a New Interstate 40 Exit a Possible Solution?

Knoxville News Sentinel (4/24, Sloan) reports that record crowds are traveling to East Tennessee and its one-of-a-kind destinations, including Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Dollywood and Buc-ee's, part of a new entertainment district coming to Sevierville. That means more cars are getting off Interstate 40 at Exit 407, the front door to the Smokies tourism destinations in Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg. There's a push to build a second front door. Getting an additional Interstate 40 exit to the Smokies funded, approved and built would be a long and expensive process. For now, it's just an idea. Where that new exit would be built (and whether it could be paid for) is still up in the air, said Allen Newton, executive director of the Sevier County Economic Development Council. But "Exit 408" would likely be constructed east of Exit 407. Even as advocates push to get the exit approved to ease traffic jams, Gov. Bill Lee's signature \$3 billion transportation plan approved by lawmakers last week could provide some relief in the future, but that's not a short-term solution.

Vermont: VTrans Works on Several Projects as Construction Season Begins

WCAX (4/24, Cooney) reports that construction season is here as the weather warms. One of the most talked about projects is the Exit 16 diverging diamond interchange in the Colchester/Winooski area. "We've started with some earth movement, we've already constructed one of the retaining walls on the bridges. We're now looking to construct the other retaining wall, we're gonna have to blast some ledge," said Michael Lacroix of the Vermont Agency of Transportation. The project aims to create a diamond interchange to help alleviate issues on the road there; it's the eighth-highest crash area in the state. Project manager Michael Lacroix said drivers can expect to see VTrans crews on the road during the day, blasting nearly every day and holding up driving for 10 to 15 minutes each time for most of the summer. They'll be switching to nights in a few months. "This is going to be a pretty intensive construction here, especially when we get into reconstructing waterline and telecommunications under the roadway, that's gonna be very slow. But a lot of that stuff can be done at night, where folks probably aren't gonna be driving through as often," said Lacroix. Statewide, drivers can expect to see construction

crews. The North Hero drawbridge project will come to completion with an operating drawbridge by May 15. Jeremy Reed with VTrans said they've recently finished a lot of projects so they're able to get to some in-between projects, too. "One on Route 2 in Marshfield. A couple down south out of Brattleboro on Route 30 and Route 9. Where we have some bridges down in Westminster and then in Hartford, we've got two pretty significant projects where we're replacing a bridge on the VA cut-off road and we're doing a rehabilitation project on the Quechee Gorge Bridge," said Reed. The bipartisan infrastructure bill passed last November. Reed says VTrans gained 28% of additional funding on top of what they normally get. He said this year there aren't any huge \$60 million projects, more like a handful of smaller ones. "A lot of our roadway reconstruction projects are in that \$20 million ballpark. So what we're seeing is less of those mega projects and a lot more, you know, \$15 million to \$20 million projects," said Reed.

Texas: 'I Didn't Really Enjoy the Idea of It': More Teens Are Putting Off Learning to Drive

KTV (4/24, Lucia) reports that at 18 years old, Katherine Franklin is learning to drive. Her mother Amy Franklin is learning to let her. "It's just the idea that someone you birthed is behind the wheel of a car," she said of the nervousness that grips her. Amy's daughter Katherine said she didn't feel the need to get her driver's license the moment she turned 16. "I was really not interested in driving. I didn't really enjoy the idea of it," said Katherine. These days, more parents are realizing their kids are in no rush to get a driver's license. For Amy who remembers being excited to drive, Katherine's feelings came as a surprise. According to the Federal Highway Administration, more than 42% of 16-year-olds had driver's licenses in 1993. By 2021, that number was down to just 25%. In the same period, the rate of 18-year-olds with licenses dropped from 72% to just below 60%. Chad Henry, owner of 3 2 1 Driving School has been teaching teens to drive for nearly three decades and says these days they're more anxious. "The license is not that rite of passage that it once was," said Henry. "Kids are becoming more and more afraid of doing it."

New York: New York Launches Highway Work Zone Speed Camera Program: Here's What You Need to Know

Stater Island Advance (4/24, Bascome) reports that a new state pilot program will crackdown on drivers speeding in work zones on New York highways through the use of Staten Islanders' least-favorite enforcement tool -- speed cameras. The new program, which launched on Monday, April 17, at the start of National Work Zone Awareness Week, is intended to protect highway construction workers who are placed at an increased risk of injury by speeding motorists. "This new pilot program will be instrumental in encouraging safe driving habits in highway work zones and protecting the lives of those who help maintain a safe and reliable highway system," said Gov. Kathy Hochul. Here's everything New Yorkers need to know about the new program.

New York: Oneida Receives Money for More Electric Vehicle Charging Stations

Oneida Daily Dispatch (4/24, Seibert) reports that the City of Oneida has been awarded \$450,711 in state money towards making the city part of the state's climate action plan. The plan is a series of attempts at reducing fossil fuel emissions and ultimately making New York completely dependent on green energy. State officials say the transportation sector is the second-largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in New York, and these electric vehicle charging stations will help the state achieve the ambitious greenhouse gas emission reduction requirements under the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. Governor Kathy Hochul recently announced that more than \$8.3 million to 70 municipalities to install electric vehicle charging stations for public use. The announcement includes an EV infrastructure plan to build more than 1,300 charging stations in support of a full transition to a zero-emission fleet of state vehicles. The money will pay for eight Level 2 charging ports and two direct current fast charger pedestals in Oneida.

FHWA Offering Grants to Protect Infrastructure from Climate Change Impacts

Progressive Railroading (4/24) reports that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has opened applications for the first round of \$848 million in competitive grant funding to make roads, bridges, transit, rail and ports more resilient to climate change. The grants will be issued through the Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Discretionary Grant Program, which was authorized by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The program will invest in projects to make the country's surface transportation system — including highways, public transportation, pedestrian facilities, ports and intercity passenger rail — more resilient to the worsening impacts of climate change, while reducing long-term costs by minimizing demands for more expensive future maintenance and rebuilding, FHWA officials said in a press release. The program prioritizes innovative and collaborative approaches to risk reduction, including approaches that harness the power of nature to protect against flood, erosion, wave damage and heat impacts.

Wisconsin: De Pere Selling Old Street Signs as City Transitions to New Ones

WFRV (4/24, Schliz) reports that the City of De Pere is in the process of replacing street name signs, which means 174 street signs will be available for purchase by community members. According to a release, the new signs will have the new City of De Pere logo and will comply with the standards established by the Federal Highway Administration. Sales of the old street signs will be first come, first served. Those interested in purchasing signs can do so at the Municipal Service Center (925 South Sixth Street) for \$10 for the first sign and \$5 for each additional sign. All proceeds will go to the City of De Pere general fund.

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Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration

Truckers And Lawmakers Pitch Tax Repeal to Meet Emission Goals

Roll Call (4/24, Yurk) notes that the Biden administration's recently proposed vehicle emissions rule is aimed at boosting production of clean cars and trucks. But a century-old tax on new heavy-duty trucks means the trucking industry could have to pay more to keep up with climate goals. Many in the trucking industry have long advocated repealing the 12 percent federal excise tax on the first sale of a heavy truck used on a highway, which can add up to \$30,000 to the price of a high-end rig. And they're confident they will receive more interest from lawmakers as Democrats in Congress and President Joe Biden look to expand the nation's clean vehicle fleet equitably and affordably. "Eliminating the [tax] will reduce the cost of new technologies by tens of thousands of dollars and is a technology-neutral solution that allows companies to invest in not only battery-electric, but alternative fuel vehicles as well depending on the availability of infrastructure to support the specific technologies," Andrew Boyle, vice chair of the industry organization the American Trucking Associations, said at a Senate hearing last Tuesday.

Just a few weeks after ATA, the American Truck Dealers and Zero Emission Transportation Association sent a letter to congressional leaders urging them to reconsider the tax, Rep. Doug LaMalfa, R-Calif., along with Rep. Chris Pappas, D-N.H., reintroduced a bill to repeal the truck excise tax. The federal excise tax on trucks was enacted in 1917 to defray the costs of World War I and eventually the Great Depression, World War II and the Korean War. It's now used to make up for declining Highway Trust Fund revenues as the federal government struggles to find funding mechanisms other than the gas tax. Some smaller fleet owners in the trucking industry are wary of repealing the federal excise tax until there's a better idea of how to backfill the lost Highway Trust Fund cash.

A spokesperson for the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association, a trucking organization

advocating for small-business truckers, explained the repealed excise tax would primarily enable large carriers to purchase new trucks while smaller carriers will likely still struggle to afford new rigs. Without the excise tax to backfill the fund, small trucking businesses are worried they will be stuck paying more taxes while larger carriers replace their fleets with new trucks, putting them at a competitive disadvantage. "The fact these proponents [of the repeal] ... have never shown any interest in identifying an offset leads us to believe they are perfectly comfortable allowing everyone in trucking to help pay for their new trucks," the spokesperson said.

Bill Sullivan, ATA's executive vice president for advocacy, argued the extra funding for the Highway Trust Fund in the infrastructure law has made the account "safe" for the time being, although it's clear further government action is necessary to replace lost funds from the tax. He added that taking the federal excise tax off of new trucks will have a "cascade" effect and also benefit small carriers, even if they're not able to purchase brand-new big rigs.

Sullivan said he's confident that discussions around supply chain issues and cleaner transportation on Capitol Hill are creating enough fervor to move legislation to repeal the tax in this Congress, and a congressional aide said there has been an uptick in interest among lawmakers. "We agree now's the time, and a lot of it is because of these requirements," Sullivan said. The Senate is also likely to vote on a joint resolution this week that would roll back EPA's regulations for smog-forming emissions — a rule that triggered an outcry from small-fleet truckers over increased costs for trucks and shipping in general. Although the resolution is unlikely to make it past Biden's desk, it signifies increased support for the industry.

Freight Routes to Get Electric, Hydrogen Infrastructure Aid

Transport Topics (4/24, Fletcher) notes that a top U.S. Department of Energy national laboratory announced it will help add electric and hydrogen infrastructure to four freight corridors covering over half of the nation. Golden, Colo.-based National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) officials noted it will collaborate with industry on four federal efforts to create regional infrastructure supporting electric vehicle charging and hydrogen fueling for medium- and heavy-duty trucks along the nation's most heavily trafficked freight corridors. The freight corridors are in Utah, the East Coast corridor on Interstate 95 (which spans Savannah, Ga., to Newark, N.J.), the Midwest corridor on I-80 (from Illinois, Indiana and Ohio) and the Northeast/New England corridor.

FMCSA Declares Driver an Imminent Hazard After Killing 4 With Big Rig

The Trucker (4/24) reports that the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) has declared New York-licensed commercial driver Saul Aquiles Carrera to be an imminent hazard to public safety and ordered him to immediately cease operating any commercial motor vehicle (CMV) in interstate or intrastate commerce. Carrera was served the federal order on April 14, according to an FMCSA news release. FMCSA officials say that Carrera killed four people and injured one other after his tractor-trailer slammed into a disabled vehicle at around 7 p.m. on March 26 along Interstate 81 in Tennessee. CNA Life (4/24, Ashley) and Truckers News (4/24) also report.

Oklahoma: Marshallese CDL Bill, Authored by Sen. Pederson Passes State House

Kay NewsCow (4/24) reports that Rep. Mike Dobrinski, R-Okeene, today passed legislation in the House that would allow Marshallese residents in Oklahoma to obtain a non-domiciled commercial driver's license (CDL) or commercial learner's permit. The licenses were previously only available to temporary agricultural workers and foreign exchange agriculture students. Dobrinski said the language in SB 682 is a collaboration with Service Oklahoma to allow these Marshallese citizens to obtain a CDL in Oklahoma like in the more than 20 other states that have approved this type of license. Sen. Roland Pederson, R-Burlington, is the Senate author of the bill. "Senate Bill 682 was one of my top legislative priorities for this year's session and I appreciate Rep. Dobrinski's hard work to make this a reality," Pederson said.

“Micronesian Day on Wednesday will be even more special as we will get to celebrate this bill being one step closer to becoming law.” In addition to the Marshallese, any person with a valid immigration status in Oklahoma would be able to obtain this type of CDL, according to Service Oklahoma. Several CDL drivers were impacted when the law changed in 2015, and this would allow those individuals to return to the workforce. Currently there are approximately 40 non-domiciled CDL holders in the state of Oklahoma; 10-15 CDLs are issued per year. These licenses are valid for 180 days

California: Amazon Delivery Drivers in Southern California Join Teamsters Union

CNBC (4/24, Palmer) reports that Amazon delivery drivers at one of the company’s California facilities joined the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the union said Monday, in a win for labor organizers that have long sought to gain a foothold at the e-retailer. A group of 84 workers at Amazon’s warehouse in Palmdale, California, won voluntary recognition by Battle-Tested Strategies, a third-party delivery contractor, to be represented by the Teamsters. That allows the workers and the Teamsters to sidestep the union election process, which can be challenging and last for many months.

How Aurora Is Navigating the Bumpy Road to Commercial Self-Driving Trucks

TechCrunch (4/24, Stevens) notes that amid economic uncertainty, tight capital markets, wary investors and consolidation in the nascent autonomous vehicle industry, Aurora Innovation is still motoring on toward its target of commercializing self-driving trucks by 2024, ticking off waypoints and milestones along the way.

It’s even managed to rack up a few wins in the past year, including launching or expanding pilot programs with FedEx, Ryder, Schneider and Uber Freight. More recently, Aurora announced its self-driving system is “feature complete” — industry jargon that means the technology has all the capabilities required for hauling freight autonomously on public roads. And it deployed the first of its “commercial ready” autonomous shipping terminals in Palmer, Texas, infrastructure needed if the company’s trucks are going to be on the road 24 hours of every day of the year. Three years ago, it wasn’t so clear if Aurora would survive its ambitious and risky moves.

Aurora is now encountering another batch of challenges as it drives toward commercialization, from assuaging shareholders and its growing list of partners to navigating regulatory hurdles in California and raising more money. And despite that “feature complete” achievement, Aurora still has plenty of testing to do, including ramping up to haul 100 loads per week between Dallas and Houston by the end of this year. The company has more than 30 trucks on the road in Texas today hauling goods with more than 50 trips a week. To date, the company’s trucks have traveled more than 400,000 miles and hauled 20 million pounds of freight for FedEx, Uber Freight, Werner and Schneider. If all goes according to plan, Aurora will deploy its self-driving system called Driver commercially in Texas, without onboard human supervision, by the end of 2024.

Those increased efficiencies and subsequent reduced costs are crucial to the appeal of Aurora’s technology to the trucking industry. But, there’s one ugly fly threateningly buzzing around the soup: California’s AB 316. If passed, this bill would require human operators in trucks within the state of California, and could kick off similar legislation elsewhere. While Urmson hopes that California will “see the economic and safety benefits” of autonomous trucking and allow driverless operation, Aurora is prepared for an eventuality where it becomes law: “It’ll mean helping our customers haul freight between Arizona and the East Coast,” Urmson said. In other words: no business in California. If policies like this gain momentum, that trend could pose a threat to Aurora’s business plan. “It would certainly be if we ended up with kind of a checkerboard across the United States,” Urmson said. “But, I think in practice that’s unlikely.”

Yellow, Teamsters to Hash Out Operational Changes by Reopening NMFA Early

FreightWaves (4/24, Maiden) reports that it appears less-than-truckload carrier Yellow Corp. and the Teamsters will renegotiate their labor contract a year early as the two parties have failed to come to terms on proposed network changes, a spokesperson with Yellow confirmed to FreightWaves on Monday. "On Friday, our board of directors voted to open our National Master Freight Agreement contract, something the IBT suggested several weeks ago," Yellow said. "Completing One Yellow is essential to our company's modernization efforts and is necessary for us to maintain and strengthen jobs while we compete against non-union carriers. Opening the contract early requires agreement from both parties; we have notified the IBT of that board decision and await a response."

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Federal Railroad Administration

California, Nevada: Las Vegas-To-California Bullet Train Gets Bipartisan Backing

AP (4/24, Ritter) reports that a bipartisan congressional group from Nevada and California asked the Biden administration Monday to fast-track federal funds for a private company to build a high-speed rail line between Las Vegas and the Los Angeles area. All six of Nevada's elected federal lawmakers and four House members from California sent the letter to U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg. They said they're on board with a proposal from Brightline West to spend more than \$10 billion to lay tracks along the Interstate 15 corridor.

The Mojave Desert is largely open space, and the electric-powered trains could potentially cut the four-hour trip in half, carrying passengers at speeds of nearly 200 mph. "This project is a major priority because it will make southern Nevada more accessible to millions of visitors each year," said U.S. Sen. Jacky Rosen, the Nevada Democrat leading the group. She said it "will boost our economy and create more good-paying jobs." Union labor will be used during construction, the company and the Southern Nevada Building Trades Union have announced in recent weeks. Brightline West is seeking \$3.75 billion in federal funding from the Biden administration-backed federal infrastructure law. The project could be "the blueprint for how we can connect major city pairs that are too short to fly and too far to drive," said Mike Reininger, CEO of Florida-based Brightline Holdings LLC, the only privately owned and operated intercity passenger railroad in the United States. Las Vegas Review-Journal (4/24, Akers), KSNV (4/24), and KTTV (4/24, Asperin) also report.

3 Railroads Join Up to Compete with CPKC To Serve Mexico

AP (4/24, Funk) reports that three major freight railroads responded Monday to the Canadian Pacific-Kansas City Southern merger with an agreement to work together on a competing service to carry shipments across North America. Canadian National, Union Pacific and Grupo Mexico railroads said Monday that they will work together to quickly move intermodal cars filled with shipping containers from Mexico north across the United States to the key hub of Chicago and further north into Canada. The new service will directly compete with CPKC's new single-line network that is the only railroad directly connecting all three countries. The three railroads said Monday they believe their service will be superior to CPKC because Grupo Mexico has a bigger rail network in Mexico and Union Pacific has a more direct route north to Chicago. All the railroads say they hope their offerings will be able to persuade companies to ship more of their products by rail instead of truck, which they say will reduce greenhouse gas emissions because railroads are more efficient over long distances. That's the long-term goal, but initially they may be fighting between each other over some of the same traffic.

Sick Leave, Crew Consists Still of the Table Between Unions, Railroads

FreightWaves (4/24, Marsh) reports that negotiations between U.S. Class I railroads and unions representing operating craft employees, such as locomotive engineers and train conductors, regarding sick leave and scheduling will likely last through summer, according to Jeremy Ferguson, president for

the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers – Transportation Division (SMART-TD). The unions and the railroads have been charged to hash out scheduling issues at the local level or the property level, as opposed to the national level. The Presidential Emergency Board, a three-person committee that had been appointed by President Joe Biden to help the railroads and the unions push through an impasse in national contract negotiations last summer, affirmed this course of action last year. The sick leave agreements are voluntary offerings, according to Ferguson, whose union represents train conductors. But the issue garnered national attention last fall, with the unions threatening to strike if the railroads failed to address sick leave in a way that was acceptable to the unions. The freight railroads countered last fall that the railroads do offer sick leave to union members. As the railroads and the remaining unions that have yet to reach sick leave agreements continue to negotiate, union negotiators “want it to be right,” Ferguson told FreightWaves. “They don’t want all the strings attached that some of the carriers are trying to put on,” he said. That includes not connecting sick leave with the company attendance policy so that employees don’t get points deducted from their attendance record for taking a sick day, Ferguson said.

Meanwhile, the issue of scheduling those who run the train — the conductors and locomotive engineers — is still on the table for some properties. The unions are seeking predictable time off for these employees, according to Ferguson. The scheduling issue is part of the crew consist issue; the question about crew consists and which crew members will be in the locomotive cab is part of a broader debate on whether the government should regulate train crew size. NS and Union Pacific (NYSE: UNP) have indicated that they will keep the conductor in the locomotive cab for now instead of transitioning that role to a ground-based position. But the specifics are still being hammered out and discussions are ongoing, according to Ferguson. Negotiations are also still occurring between the unions and BNSF on crew consists, he said. The responsibilities of brakemen and switchmen as part of the scheduling issue have also been debated, according to a copy obtained by FreightWaves of one of the drafts between SMART-TD and certain UP territories.

Pennsylvania: Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Project Brought to the Attention of Senior White House Advisor

WFMZ (4/24, Kostival) reports that the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority on Monday learned that the effort to restore passenger rail service between Reading and Philadelphia was brought to the attention of a senior advisor to the Biden Administration. Scott France, a member of the authority and the director the Montgomery County Planning Commission, reported that Mitch Landrieu, a White House senior advisor responsible for implementing the coordination of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, visited Conshohocken on Friday. “Congresswoman Madeleine Dean brought Mitch Landrieu, also a former mayor of New Orleans, to Conshohocken to spend some time with a broad delegation of representatives to talk about a number of infrastructure projects. The authority is a tri-county effort between Berks, Chester and Montgomery Counties to restore passenger rail service between Reading and Philadelphia. A key component to the effort is getting the SRPRA project accepted into the Federal Railroad Administration’s Corridor Identification Development Program, which would open the door to the planning process. The authority has submitted the application and expects to find out results in mid-September.

California: Coastal Erosion Threatens to Further Derail OC Train Lines

KCRW (4/24, Reed) notes that service resumed last week on a crucial regional train track that had been derailed for months because of shifting land in south San Clemente. In September, landslides combined with storm surges to displace 700 hundred feet of track. Metrolink and Amtrak trains are now running again from LA to San Diego after months of emergency repairs. But even after bolstering the track, the threat of coastal erosion and sand loss remain. LA Times Columnist Gustavo Arellano says this might

mean the tracks will have to be rerouted inland at great expense. “Mike Levin, the congressman who represents southern Orange County and northern San Diego County, is working a thing out with the feds where there's gonna be \$4 million given to the Orange County Transportation Authority so they could do a study about what [they should] do.” In the meantime, local officials are working with state and federal partners to resupply sand between the tracks and the ocean. Millions of dollars have already been allocated for the project.

Texas: Union Pacific to Test Soil of Houston's Fifth Ward Residents Amid Claims of Cancer Cluster

KHOU (4/24, Dougherty) reports that in the coming weeks, Union Pacific Railroad will be visiting residents' homes in Houston's Fifth Ward to perform testing on their soil. Groundwater beneath the Union Pacific site has said to be contaminated by creosote. Neighbors in the Fifth Ward have been dealing with this for years and claim Union Pacific has been dragging its feet. Now new testing will reveal if a greater portion of the community may have been affected. Before Union Pacific purchased the property in question, it operated for years as a creosote plant. It was the spot where wooden railroad ties would be dipped into black tar-like material — allowing it to weather storms, and live much longer rot-free. As the years went on, neighbors started getting sick. Testing performed by the Houston Health Department revealed cancer clusters in the Fifth Ward. Children were even diagnosed with lymphoma.

Missouri: Amtrak Plans \$13M Project At Union Station

Meridian Star (4/24, Howard) reports that residents and visitors to the Queen City will soon see a bustle of activity near Union Station as Amtrak looks to overhaul its passenger platforms. In a meeting last week, Community Development Director Craig Hitt told the Meridian City Council Amtrak had requested permission to make improvements to its facilities and needed the city's permission, as part of the project would involve city-owned property. “This is a project that Amtrak has asked us to participate in, basically just allowing them to come in and do the work,” he said. “Some of it will be done on city property, but they will be covering all the costs.” Amtrak Senior Public Relations Manager Marc Magliari said Amtrak hopes to begin the project, which is expected to cost about \$13 million, by the end of the 2023. The upgrades will be done in stages to avoid interrupting service to the Meridian station while construction is underway. While travelers will still be able to use Union Station, Magliari said maintaining service does require some sacrifices. The phased approach, he said, takes longer, and the project is not expected to be complete until 2025.

North Dakota: Railroad Gets Final Permits to Replace Bismarck-Mandan Rail Bridge; Work on \$100M Project Beginning

Bismarck Tribune (4/24, Nicholson) reports that North Dakota's Department of Water Resources has issued two state permits that are the last regulatory permissions BNSF Railway needs to replace the Bismarck-Mandan Rail Bridge over the Missouri River between the two cities. The decision comes over the objections of a local citizens group that has indicated it might sue over the project. Friends of the Rail Bridge President Mark Zimmerman said the group is disappointed with the state's decision, and FORB's attorney is reviewing it. “We could certainly look at a challenge in court,” he said, adding that the group “stands firm” on issues including its belief that the state owns the bridge. Water Resources for months has been considering whether to issue two sovereign lands permits — one for construction of a new bridge, and one for removal of the old. Sovereign lands of North Dakota are defined as areas lying within the ordinary high-water marks of navigable lakes and streams.

Maryland: MARC Eyes Regional Service Expansion to Delaware, Virginia

Mary and Matters (4/24, Sears) reports that efforts to expand Maryland's commuter rail service into a regional system took a step forward with the signing of an agreement with officials in Delaware and Virginia. The framework agreement signed earlier this month opens the door to discussion that could

lead to expanded service to Newark and northern Virginia. The agreements are an initial step in ongoing discussions between Maryland and Delaware and Virginia. Seamless rail passage between the states is likely still years away. "Maryland is committed to working with our neighbors to increase convenient and accessible transit across the entire region because we know an expanded transit network leads to expanded opportunities for everyone," Gov. Wes Moore (D) said in a statement. "The partnerships outlined in these agreements will help us bring greater options to thousands of potential transit riders." All three states would need to finalize a plan that will also likely include agreements with Amtrak, CSX and others.

The envisioned system would more easily connect Maryland rail commuters in Cecil County to the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority system. State transportation officials still need to evaluate operations and infrastructure needs in Maryland. In January, the state signed an agreement to begin the replacement of the B&P Tunnel, now known as the Frederick Douglass Tunnel. At the same time, Maryland transportation officials are studying potential expansion of MARC service from Martinsburg, West Virginia into Western Maryland. Potential stops include Hagerstown, Hancock and Cumberland.

New York: Congressman Marc Molinaro Holds Railroad Industry Roundtable for the Southern Tier

WBNG (4/24, Meade) reports that New York Congressman for District 17 Marc Molinaro visited the new Binghamton Fire Headquarters downtown to talk about challenges in the railroad industry following the accident in Palestine Ohio. Molinaro met with leaders from the Southern Tier community, local emergency service members, and members of Norfolk Southern to address concerns in our rail systems like access points, infrastructure on bridges and overpasses, better safety training for staff, and other issues. The Congressman spoke at the meeting about the demand for help in upstate New York. The group agreed on different ways to help improve the rail systems like adding more railroad track inspections, mock disaster drills to prevent more from happening, as well as send specialists to train staff on railroad anatomy, and what shipments to be aware of. "Hopefully from this I can bring some of the ideas we hear here today to the committee as we focus on not only the dollars but some of the policy necessary, I'd have a more effective response." said Molinaro.

New York: DOT Confirms Truck Hit CSX Bridge Over Onondaga Lake Parkway After Sheriff's Deputies Were Told Otherwise

WSYR (4/24, Donovan) reports that the State Department of Transportation confirms to NewsChannel 9 that a truck belonging to one of its contractors hit the CSX railroad bridge over Onondaga Lake Parkway Monday morning. The DOT spokesperson says the contractor was setting up a work zone to make way for DOT crews to repair damage to the bridge's orange warning panels from previous truck crashes. The confirmation ends hours of conflicting reports, including the Onondaga County Sheriff's Office saying the bridge wasn't hit. After NewsChannel 9 shared the state's confirmation with the Sheriff's Office, the agency's spokesperson, Tom Newton, said the investigation is being reopened after his deputies were given inaccurate information after responding to the scene. According to a count by NewsChannel 9, this is the fifth truck to [hit] the bridge over Onondaga Lake Parkway this year.

New York: Repairs Underway on Bridge Dripping Sticky Substance

News10 (4/24, Ward) reports that repairs are underway on a rail bridge in West Coxsackie that's been dripping a messy substance on passing cars. Drivers told NEWS10 they have been unable to get the substance off their vehicles. The mayor of Coxsackie said the bridge, which goes over Mansion Street, has been an issue his entire time in office, spanning almost 15 years. CSX Railroad company operates the bridge. They said the substance is made of mud that's seeped into the bridge.

Federal Transit Administration

Sen. Markey, Rep. Pressley Announce New Push for Fare-Free Public Transit Across the Country

Boston.com (4/24, Curwin) reports that with transit ridership levels struggling to recover to pre-pandemic levels and historically high levels of congestion in their home state, Sen. Ed Markey and Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley reintroduced legislation Monday that would make more buses fare-free nationwide. The “Freedom to Move Act,” also co-sponsored by Sen. Elizabeth Warren, would provide \$5 billion per year over five years in competitive grant funding to state and local governments looking to introduce fare-free transit programs. Additionally, the proposal would look to “close equity gaps in current transit systems,” investing in the safety and quality of public transportation specifically in low-income and historically underserved communities.

The two members of the Massachusetts delegation proposed the same bill in 2020 and in 2021, but the proposals failed to gain the support needed to push through. WHDH (4/24, Bookman), NBC Boston (4/24, Beltran), and the Boston Herald (4/24, Zokovitch) also report.

Massachusetts: Feds Tighten Leash On Embattled Massachusetts Transit Agency; Gov. Healey Just Appointed the First MassDOT Safety Chief

LNR New England (4/24, Van Voorhis) reports that the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) met an April 24 deadline to file a safety plan with federal regulators for repair work in dangerous right-of-way zones following a series of close calls involving track workers, a spokesperson for the agency confirmed. The embattled transit agency was on the hook to submit a four-part plan with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA)—or face having to shut down all track repair work—in the wake of five near-misses in March and April involving track workers and trains, and a sixth incident that left a worker seriously injured. The MBTA was also required to do analysis for all rail lines on how many worker crews can be safely granted access and monitored at any point in time. The plan must all address “lessons learned,” as well as “radio limitations” and “staffing and hours of service limitations.”

MBTA workers that the FTA is particularly concerned about in terms of being forced to handle too much work at once include “dispatchers, Engineering & Maintenance department scheduling coordinators, operations superintendents, night trackmasters, operations construction supervisory personnel, flaggers, crew forepersons, and motorpersons.” The series of close calls and the FTA’s intervention also has major ramifications for the private sector contractors the MBTA relies upon to do repairs, maintenance, and other projects, a group that includes Middlesex Corp. and Barletta Heavy Division.

The “FTA remains deeply concerned regarding MBTA’s implementation of its right of way (ROW) access procedures and practices,” wrote Joe DeLorenzo, an associate administrator and chief safety officer with the FTA. “Given recent events ... FTA finds that a combination of unsafe conditions and practices exist such that there is a substantial risk of death or personal injury.”

The MBTA’s new general manager, Phillip Eng, announced plans last week to speed up repairs on the Blue Line in order to eliminate slow zones there by November. In a bid to ramp up repairs, the MBTA has authorized spending as much as an additional \$72 million for track repairs over the next two years, and recently went out to bid to seek out contractors for the work. “FTA Special Directive 22-8 requires the MBTA to take corrective action concerning deferred track maintenance,” said Joe Pesaturo, a spokesperson for the agency, in an email. “These contracts will provide additional resources to perform the work to address deferred track maintenance across the system.” Each morning before 5 a.m., the

MBTA also has to send copies of all right-of-way access forms to both the FTA and the state Dept. of Public Utilities showing “access granted to work crews, by line, in effect for the 24-hour period beginning with the start of revenue service, that includes name, badge number, access location start point and end point, and associated access start and end times.” In addition, the T must submit a “work site hazards” assessments each day before 5 a.m. with both agencies.

Gov. Healey Just Appointed the First MassDOT Safety Chief. Here's What He'll Do.

Meanwhile, *Boston.com* (4/24, Sudborough) reports that Gov. Maura Healey fulfilled one of her campaign promises Monday by appointing Pat Lavin, a seasoned transit safety official, to the newly-created position of chief safety officer of the Department of Transportation. Lavin has 40 years of experience in transportation safety and operations, most of which was spent improving safety in the New York City transit system, Healey's office said in a news release about his appointment. He was also part of a 2019 safety audit of the MBTA. Lavin's appointment comes shortly after Healey's Friday announcement that she will replace three members of the MBTA's board of directors with her own appointments. It's no secret that change is needed at the MBTA. Just last week, federal transit officials once again cited the transit system's safety issues, threatening to shut down track work if it didn't make conditions safer for workers. This came in the wake of news that workers at the MBTA were almost killed four times in the last two months. *WCVB* (4/24), *WHDH* (4/24), and *Salem News* (4/24, Wade) also report.

The Filthy Truth About Subway Air

Wired (4/24, Barnaiuk) notes that some years ago, a colleague of Terry Gordon, an environmental health scientist at New York University, got a shockingly high reading on a particulate monitor when he entered a subway station in New York. “He thought it was broken,” recalls Gordon. But it wasn't. That reading inspired a much-discussed study, published in 2021, on particulate concentrations in various subway stations in New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, and other locations in the northeastern US. It's just one of numerous recent papers that have documented particulate pollution in subway and metro systems around the world—reflecting a growing concern that city commuting could carry a health risk.

Earlier this month, prosecutors in Paris opened a criminal investigation over allegations that air pollution in the capital's metro was endangering people's lives. Not only that, the operator of the underground railway system there, RATP, has been accused of deliberately underreporting pollution levels—which it denies. The fact that particulates are present in metro systems, often at concentrations many times those found at street level, is undeniable. The rubbing of metal wheels on tracks, or brakes on wheels, shears off tiny metal particles that get kicked up into the air as trains move. The question is how the dusty tunnels of the world's metro systems compare on this point—and whether science reveals any genuine health risks for people who travel or work in these environments. Long-term exposure to particulate matter is known to be linked to a variety of heart and lung problems, as well as premature death. Gordon, though, was surprised to hear about the legal case in Paris. “Paris is nothing compared to London,” he says. And no metro stations anywhere, he adds, are as particulate-prone as those in and around New York—at least according to his research.

The Incredible Shrinking Transit Plan

Bloomberg (4/24, Schneider) notes that in 2020, Austin voters overwhelmingly approved a \$7 billion public transit plan. Then the costs started going up. The estimated price tag for the light rail expansion nearly doubled, from \$5.8 billion in the 2020 plan to \$10.3 billion in 2022. The agency behind Project Connect, the Austin Transit Partnership, had no choice but to trim its ambitions. Instead of 28 miles of new light rail, the city will get between six and 10 miles of track. The airport connection and downtown tunnel may not be built after all — at least not in the initial phase. And some neighborhoods expecting

rail service will have to wait indefinitely.

Austin is far from the only US city where transit plans are being scaled back, “re-sequenced,” or killed entirely. Philadelphia canceled a light rail extension to suburban King of Prussia after cost estimates increased by 50% in three years. Atlanta is pausing two planned light rail projects and focusing on cheaper bus rapid transit instead due to high costs. Long-planned subways in Manhattan and San Jose are delayed and facing calls for redesigns amid spiraling cost estimates. Pandemic-era disruptions and inflation — of materials, labor and real estate — help explain some of the trend. But factors within government’s control, like design, project management and political structures, also contribute.

Transportation infrastructure has long been more expensive to build in the US than in the rest of the world, and this recent spate of scaled-back projects should leave no doubt: America’s transit costs crisis is taking a major toll on the nation’s ability to actually build transit. “These high costs prohibit us from doing all the good projects that are out there,” said Eric Goldwyn, program director for the NYU Marron Institute and co-leader of the Transit Costs Project. “And then we don’t even debate or discuss them because it’s just so ridiculous.”

In Austin, the same red-hot growth trends that make the light rail project necessary are boosting its price tag: The booming Texas capital has seen significant increases in land and labor costs in recent years. An extension of the light rail system’s downtown tunnel midway through the design process was another major contributor to increased costs for Project Connect. But it also appears that the city was unprepared to manage a transit project at this scale. In 2022, an independent analysis of the Austin project’s governance from the Eno Center for Transportation found that it was unclear who was in charge of various aspects of the project. Shortly thereafter, the city restructured Project Connect’s leadership and the increased costs were revealed to the public. It also became evident that the city’s attempt to win two New Starts grants from the Federal Transit Administration at the same time — one for each light rail line — was unrealistic. “Now we know that’s not how the FTA does things,” said João Paulo Connolly, organizing director for the Austin Justice Coalition and a member of the Community Advisory Committee for Project Connect. “I think there was a bit of a jumping of the gun.”

Texas: Project Connect Could Be on the Ballot Again This November

KUT (4/24, Bernier) reports that Austin’s mayor is adopting a new strategy against a Texas bill that threatens to derail the city’s voter-approved transit expansion: Get the legislation passed as quickly as possible with overwhelming support in the Texas House and Senate. The approach seemed shockingly counterintuitive to some Project Connect advocates who would prefer Austin try to slay the legislation rather than accept the bill’s likely passage in the Republican-led Legislature. But Mayor Kirk Watson, who spent more than 13 years in the Texas Senate, says he would rather try to create the most favorable possible conditions for an election this November. “There’s not a concession here,” Watson told KUT. “This isn’t about winning the battle and losing the war. I want to win the war on this.”

HB 3899 would require the Austin Transit Partnership (ATP) — a local government corporation created to design, finance and build the light-rail system — to obtain voter approval before issuing bonds. Bonds are a form of debt that helps governments and corporations raise money. If the bill passes and an election is held and Austin voters choose not to allow ATP to issue long-term debt, light-rail could become impossible to finance. The ATP is currently planning to issue about \$1.75 billion in bonds, treasurer Bryan Rivera said. The agency would use the dedicated property tax approved by voters in 2020 to repay the bonds over 35 years. But a vote to terminate ATP’s bonding capacity would not lower taxes. Likewise, granting ATP the power to issue bonds would not raise the tax rate.

Missouri: Federal Grant Helps Keep Buses Rolling

St. Joseph News-Press (4/24, Kozol) reports that the city of St. Joseph is in line to receive a \$2.2 million

Federal Transit Administration grant that helps keep the city buses running for another year. The federal grant covers about a quarter of the \$8.5 million that it takes to keep the transit system, which is currently marketed as Go St. Joe, moving. The remaining \$6.6 million comes primarily from the three-eighths cent local sales tax that funds transit services. “We get a grant this size about every year,” said Chance Gallagher, the city’s deputy director of public works and transportation. “Of course, \$2 million doesn’t cover the system, but it definitely helps.”

The grant comes at a key time for transit services in St. Joseph. Labor tensions between unionized bus drivers and Transit Management of St. Joseph bubbled to the surface after the two sides were unable to agree on a new contract following negotiations that dragged on into the fall and winter. Bus drivers picketed in front of City Hall and outlined their grievances, including their belief the city was sitting on a large fund balance from the local transit tax, at a City Council meeting in early April. The city contracts with Transit Services of St. Joseph to operate the bus system.

North Carolina: CATS On the Ground - A Charlotte Public Transit Experiment

Charlotte Magazine (4/24, Allen) notes that CATS ridership has declined 75% since 2014—a third of that before COVID. Leadership and other organizational problems, coupled with the threat of violent crime—in February 2022, driver Ethan Rivera was shot and killed on the job—has contributed to a driver shortage, which means buses that show up late or not at all. Many are broken down. “I wouldn’t put my family on one of them buses,” former CATS mechanic Louis Rugieri told WBTV last August. The bus fleet is actually smaller, serving five fewer routes and 584 fewer stops than in 2013.

The city has a plan—of sorts—to try to improve the transit system as a whole. A task force headed by former Mayor Harvey Gantt unveiled Charlotte MOVES in late 2020. It’s essentially a list of upgrades that would cost an estimated \$13.5 billion, to be raised through a one-cent sales tax increase atop the half-cent sales tax that has paid for transit countywide since 1998. But raising the tax would require voters to approve it by referendum, and state lawmakers would have to agree to place it on the ballot. To date, they haven’t, and City Council member Ed Driggs tells me there’s little point in lobbying the General Assembly until the city comes up with a more detailed plan. To date, it hasn’t.

California: Gov. Gavin Newsom Allocates Millions to Fund Public Transportation Projects in Disadvantaged Communities

KTLA (4/24, Palm) reports that California Gov. Gavin Newsom announced Monday that more than \$690 million would fund 28 public transportation projects in disadvantaged communities. The new funding will conclude the first wave of the state’s initiative to expand transit and passenger rail service throughout the state,

San Jose Mercury News (4/24, Greschier) also reports that long-awaited East San Jose transit extension is finally closer to happening after local and state officials announced Monday that the last slice of funding for the \$530 million plan has been secured. California’s Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program will inject \$46 million into a project set to extend the Valley Transportation Agency’s orange line light rail service along a 2.4-mile stretch between Alum Rock and Eastridge Transit Centers — an underserved part of the wider South Bay transit infrastructure, and an area where many of the city’s working-class residents reside.

California: ‘There Are No People Here’ - S.F.’S \$2.2 Billion Transit Center Remains an Empty Cavern

San Francisco Chronicle (4/24, Said) notes that two distinct realities — vibrant activity and eerie emptiness — are juxtaposed at Transbay transit center, the three-block-long behemoth cloaked in curvaceous white steel located south of Mission Street, running from Beale Street to just shy of Second

Street. One of the Bay Area's biggest infrastructure projects in decades, the transit center sees its ambitions reflected in the moniker "The Grand Central Station of the West." But Transbay transit center is a far cry from the bustle of New York's august Beaux-Arts rail terminal, which is frequented by some 750,000 people a day. There's no question that the pandemic still drastically affects the terminal. AC Transit, its main transit provider, is running only about 57% of its pre-pandemic routes. It now averages about 3,895 bus passengers each weekday, down from 17,436 in February 2020.

In some ways, the transit center is a microcosm of San Francisco's moribund downtown, which is having the slowest recovery among U.S. cities, with only about 36% of pre-pandemic workers returning to offices — and that was before the recent waves of tech layoffs. But even without the pandemic effect, the transit center would hardly be crowded. It was built to accommodate a future vision of 100,000 passengers a day from buses and trains. Pre-pandemic, the bus passengers accounted for just under a fifth of what the massive structure ultimately can serve. Right now, they make up less than a scant 5%. And, notably, there are no trains. As Supervisor Aaron Peskin once said, without rail connections, the \$2.2 billion structure "looks like the most expensive bus terminal in the history of humankind." Running the 1,600-foot length of the building, the two subterranean levels currently have all the architectural allure of a parking garage. But when Adam Van de Water, the executive director of the Transbay Joint Powers Authority, shows them off, he conjures visions of a future in which the first below-ground level would host a concourse where tens of thousands of people would buy tickets, wait for trains and pop into shops and cafes. In addition, a megaproject to bring rail — from the East Bay to the city via a tunnel under the bay — sees the transit center as its terminus. That project, known as Link21, is decades away and has a current \$29 billion price tag.

New York: NYC Subway Fare Hike Postponed Because of State Budget Delay

Bloomberg (4/24, Kaske) reports that an anticipated 5.5% fare hike on New York City subways, buses and commuter rail lines is delayed until July or August as the state's overdue budget is holding up implementing the new charges. The state-run Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which oversees New York City's transit network, must wait for lawmakers in Albany to finalize the state's fiscal 2024 budget before boosting fares as planned. The MTA needs the state to provide additional funding to help close a \$600 million deficit this year that's projected to grow to \$3 billion in 2025. The MTA initially planned a 5.5% fare and toll increase in June but will need to postpone that to later in the summer, an official said during a finance committee meeting on Monday.

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Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation

Ohio: Port of Cleveland Solicits Bids on Estimated \$55 Million Stabilization of Irishtown Bend Hillside

Cleveland Plain Dealer (4/24, Litt) reports that the Port of Cleveland announced Monday that it will accept bids through May 31 for a project to stabilize the Irishtown Bend hillside estimated to cost roughly \$55 million. The project, which is designed to prevent a landslide that could halt shipping on the Cuyahoga River, will precede a related effort to create a 23-acre park on the hillside with sweeping views of the river and the downtown skyline. The nonprofit LAND Studio, Ohio City Inc., and Canalway Partners are working on finalizing plans for the park in tandem with the Port and other entities including the City of Cleveland. A spokesman for the Port said Monday that the agency "felt confident enough to go ahead and start the bidding process so we can take advantage of this construction season." The spokesman, Jade Davis, said stabilization work could start late this summer or in the fall.

Michigan: Freightier Runs Aground Near Muskegon Channel

WOOD (4/24, Gilder) reports that a freighter ran aground near the entrance to the Muskegon Channel Monday. The U.S. Coast Guard said there were no reports of injuries on the Kaye E. Barker and no imminent danger. Just after 9:30 p.m. Monday, the Coast Guard said the freighter had been “safely refloated” after some cargo was removed. The boat was moored in Muskegon. This is the second spring in a row that the Kaye E. Barker ran aground at Muskegon. The same thing happened on April 29, 2022.

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Maritime Administration

California: Singapore, Los Angeles, and Long Beach Agree to Green Corridor

Maritime Executive (4/24) reports that the ports of Singapore, Long Beach, and Los Angeles, supported by C40 Cities, a global intercity partnership, began discussions to establish a green and digital shipping corridor in November 2022. Today in Singapore at the start of Maritime Week, the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA), Port of Los Angeles, and Port of Long Beach, with C40 Cities, signed a memorandum of understanding to establish a green and digital shipping corridor between Singapore and the San Pedro Bay ports complex to support the decarbonization of the maritime industry and improve efficiencies through digitalization. “No single port or organization can tackle the challenge of decarbonizing the supply chain alone, no matter how innovative their technology or robust their efforts,” said the Port of Los Angeles’ Executive Director Gene Seroka. “The establishment of this green shipping corridor between the San Pedro Bay Port Complex and Singapore will prove to be a living, breathing testament to the power of global collaboration.” Under the terms of the agreement, the three ports committed to facilitating the supply and adoption of low- and zero-emission fuels and exploring the necessary infrastructure and regulations for bunkering. In addition to identifying and collaborating on pilot and demonstration projects, the memorandum aims to identify digital shipping solutions and develop standards and best practices for green ports and the bunkering of alternative marine fuels, including sharing experiences at international platforms such as IMO. “The signing of this MOU signals our collective will to pool our resources, technical insights, industry, and research networks to deliver scalable green as well as digital corridor solutions to help the maritime industry attain the 2050 emission reduction targets expected of the International Maritime Organization and help spur the development of green growth opportunities,” said Teo Eng Dih, Chief Executive of MPA. gCaptain (4/24, Schuler) provides additional coverage.

Wall Street Journal: The Jones Act Is Unconstitutional

An opinion piece in Wall Street Journal (4/24, Heavenrich) argues that the Merchant Marine Act of 1920 is special-interest politics at its worst—a destructive law that Congress can’t seem to repeal. The protectionist statute, commonly known as the Jones Act, prohibits foreign vessels from transporting goods between U.S. ports. As a consequence, domestic waterborne transportation is restricted to U.S. vessels, which are more expensive to operate and tend to be considerably older and less safe than their foreign counterparts. Studies estimate that the Jones Act costs the U.S. economy more than a billion dollars annually, with noncontiguous areas such as Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico bearing the brunt of its effects. Despite the cost of the law, powerful shipping and shipbuilding interests have successfully lobbied to keep it afloat. But there may be a solution in one of the most neglected provisions of the Constitution: the Port Preference Clause. That clause, in Article I, Section 9, prohibits Congress from giving preference “by any regulation of commerce or revenue to the ports of one state over those of another.” And that’s exactly what the Jones Act does. Contiguous states with major ports thrive, while states with ports more remote from the mainland suffer. The Congressional Research Service found in 2019 that the domestic Jones Act fleet is “almost entirely engaged” in serving Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico, “where shippers have little alternative.”

A case arguing that the Jones Act violates the Port Preference Clause would hew to Founding-era understandings of the Constitution—an important consideration for an increasingly originalist Supreme Court. Smaller states’ fears of domination by larger states figured prominently at the 1787 Constitutional Convention. It’s why we have a Senate in which states are represented equally. It’s also why the Port Preference Clause made it into the Constitution in 1787. The Founders’ concerns about large-state domination are particularly relevant to the Jones Act. The most affected states’ lack of congressional clout makes a legislative fix unlikely. And the history and context of the Jones Act’s passage is replete with evidence that Congress intended to target Alaska and Hawaii. Sen. Wesley Jones (R., Wash.), the law’s namesake, sought for decades to restrict trade in territories outside the contiguous U.S. to benefit his home state’s shipping industry. But that stopped being constitutional, if it ever was, when Alaska and Hawaii were admitted as states. In purpose and effect, the Jones Act has carved out a market for the domestic shipping industry at the expense of citizens living in the noncontiguous U.S. But the Jones Act is more vulnerable than it appears. A constitutional challenge to the Jones Act could bring relief to those on America’s geographic peripheries who, like the Port Preference Clause, have been ignored for too long.

New Jersey: Gov. Murphy Kills Another Watchdog

An editorial from *Star Ledger* (4/24) argues that the Waterfront Commission will soon be consigned into history – metaphorically dumped into Newark Bay, where it shall sleep with the fishes – because this is what the governor, his legislative collaborators, and his union supporters from the International Longshoremen’s Association have sought for many years. That will leave the task of preventing the mob from running amok at the ports in the hands of the New Jersey State Police, and they assure us that they are equipped to handle it. But as he drowns his second watchdog in less than a month, Gov. Murphy should also know this: If there are no substantial improvements at the ports -- where corruption, no-show jobs, and discriminatory hiring practices are endemic, and certain to get worse if the unions are allowed to make their own rules – that’s on him. Or to put it another way: If Murphy breaks it, he owns it. Murphy has always been curiously eager to kill the Commission -- even with labor racketeering still prevalent at the ports – and it was hard to overlook his cringingly close relationship with ILA leadership, even echoing its persistent bleating about how the Commission smothered commerce with over-regulation and strict hiring guidelines. Now that he has murdered the watchdog, the State Police will in charge of vetting and licensing of dockworkers, taxing their payrolls, fighting for disparity, and ferreting out criminality. New York governor Kathy Hochul, who fought Murphy’s efforts to disband the Commission, has insisted that this will lead to “increased crime to higher prices to employment inequities.” Those are the stakes. Murphy got what he wished for, and now the rest of us can only hope he doesn’t regret it.

New Jersey: Panel: Climate Change, Not Wind Prep, Is Threat to Whales

AP (4/24, Parry) reports that climate change, spurred by the burning of fossil fuels, is the biggest danger to marine life including whales, a panel of Democratic officials and environmental groups said Monday. The gathering, held in an oceanfront conference room as a half-dozen dolphins frolicked in the ocean behind them, also strongly criticized a bill in the House of Representatives containing numerous incentives for oil and gas companies, and which eliminates several environmental protections currently in effect. It also was a retort to opponents of offshore wind development, who claim that preparation for wind farms off New Jersey and New York are killing whales along the U.S. East Coast. Numerous federal and state agencies say there is no evidence that the deaths are related to offshore wind survey work. The event came a week after U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone Jr. and other New Jersey Congressional Democrats wrote to the White House Council on Environmental Quality “demanding real solutions in response to the death of marine mammals off New Jersey’s coast.” But the letter did not seek pause in offshore wind projects as many Republicans demand. Chris Smith and Jeff Van Drew, two Republican

Congressmen from New Jersey, want the work stopped at least temporarily. Neither responded to a request for comment Monday. No Republican elected officials were at Monday's event.

At Monday's event, Pallone said, "The science has not linked the whale deaths to offshore wind activities. Climate change is the biggest threat to marine mammals." Pallone and others said that as water temperatures rise, fish species that whales prey upon have been moving into different areas, bringing whales more frequently into the path of heavily traveled shipping lanes off the East Coast. Shawn LaTourette, New Jersey's environmental protection commissioner, said the migrating bait fish are "bringing marine life into direct contact with the shipping superhighway that sits off our coast." As Ed Potosnak of the New Jersey League of Conservation Voters put it, "They're having a picnic in the Parkway; they're getting hit." Of the 32 whales that have died off the East Coast since Dec. 1, many have shown signs of being struck by ships or being entangled in discarded fishing gear, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. In an interview with The Associated Press earlier this month after a speech at Monmouth University, NOAA's administrator, Richard Spinrad, said ship strikes are a common cause of recent whale deaths. "We study the fisheries, where the fish are, what the populations are, and there is some thought as to the whales following a change, a shift in where the prey is that the whales feed on, which may be a consequence of a change in the ocean itself," Spinrad said. "By moving further inshore these whales are then more vulnerable to things like ship strikes. The science that we have conducted suggests there is not a link between the activities of offshore wind and the strandings we've seen along the East Coast."

Push for IMO to Set 'Ambitious' Climate Goals for Shipping

Seatrade Maritime (4/24, Hand) reports that the IMO is set to adopt a revised greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions strategy from the MEPC (Marine Environment Protection Committee) 80 meeting in July with increasingly intense lobbying by countries that want to see a commitment to net zero emissions by 2050 versus others that want a more conservative strategy. "I believe that as they debate, the new strategy IMO member states must be ambitious and bold enough to elevate their vision and their levels of ambitions towards 2050," Secretary-General Lim told attendees at the opening ceremony of Singapore Maritime Week (SMW) on Monday. We must lead the way and provide a global framework for the maritime industry to strive for green shipping and at the same time, we must ensure we leave no-one behind." In a video address to the SMW opening ceremony, John Kerry, US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, said, "There is no path to eliminate global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius without achieving zero emissions from the shipping sector. So this the year that all of efforts can really come together and build the momentum that we need. In July the International Maritime Organization (IMO) must revise its greenhouse gas strategy to include a goal of zero emissions no later than 2050 and that has to be the North Star for climate ambition for this sector."

FMC Commissioners Support Bill to Strengthen Anticompetitive Powers

Maritime Executive (4/24) reports that U.S. legislators continued to target the business practices of the shipping industry seeking to revise the Ocean Shipping Act to increase the authority of the Federal Maritime Commission and stop what they see as abusive behavior that they believe is anticompetitive. For the third time in less than a month, a bill has been introduced before the U.S. House of Representatives, this one called the Ocean Shipping Competition Enforcement Act, which comes with the support of FMC Commissioners Max Vekich and Carl Bentzel. According to the bill's sponsor, Representative John Garamendi of California, the proposed legislation would allow the Federal Maritime Commission to block any agreements among ocean carriers and marine terminal operators determined to be unreasonably anticompetitive without having to first obtain a federal court order. Current federal law requires the FMC, which is an independent federal regulatory agency, to review proposed agreements between ocean carriers or marine terminal operators to ensure any such agreements are not unreasonably anticompetitive. However, the FMC cannot block an anticompetitive agreement

without first obtaining a federal court order.

“The ocean shipping industry was the last transportation sector deregulated by Congress in 1984. Because of that, today the industry is now dominated by nine foreign-flagged ocean liners that openly collude under three carrier alliances handling some 80 percent of cargo. After reforming our nation’s ocean shipping laws for the first time in nearly a quarter century, Congress must ensure that the Federal Maritime Commission can do its job and fully enforce the law,” said Garamendi in a written statement after proposing the law. Federal Maritime Commissioner Carl Bentzel called the proposed legislation a “vital fix,” that would provide the authority necessary to challenge an anticompetitive agreement. In December 2022, Federal Maritime Commissioners Vekich and Bentzel requested that the U.S. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure make this critical change in federal law. “This legislation will simplify the process by which the FMC reviews agreements among the largest foreign-owned entities in our supply chain,” said Vekich. “While agreements often have pro-competitive benefits, it is important for the FMC, as the watchdog agency, to once again have the ability to determine when such agreements go too far and result in an unreasonable reduction in competition which produces an unreasonable decrease in service or increase in cost.” Vallejo Times Herald (4/24, Gase) provides additional coverage.

Georgia: Ports Authority Sees Sustained Growth in Ro/Ro Cargo Handling

gCaptain (4/24, Schuler) reports that the Georgia Ports Authority (GPA) is marking a significant milestone as it records eight consecutive months of growth in Roll-on/Roll-off (Ro/Ro) cargo handling. In March alone, the Port of Brunswick processed 62,100 units of vehicles and heavy equipment, with Savannah’s Ocean Terminal contributing an additional 1,700 units, totaling 63,800 units. This volume represents a 22% increase compared to the same period last year. GPA Executive Director Griff Lynch attributes this success to new customers and increased trade with long-standing partners. The Port of Brunswick’s Colonel’s Island Terminal stands out for its available space, connectivity to key markets, and ease of doing business, Lynch said. More than 24 automakers depend on the Port of Brunswick for their operations. As of March, the fiscal year-to-date figures reveal that GPA has managed 540,735 units of vehicles and heavy equipment, marking an 80,443-unit or 17.5% increase. The Ro/Ro cargo monthly average for Fiscal Year 2023 now stands at 60,082 units, a significant improvement from FY22’s 51,144-unit average. GPA Chief Commercial Officer Cliff Pyron explains that an easing of the microchip shortage has led to increased production, contributing to the growth at Brunswick. “The logjam in microchip availability is starting to break, and manufacturers have increased production to meet pent-up demand,” said Pyron. “Asian and European trade lanes account for most of the expansion in Brunswick’s trade, but production in Mexico is a growing factor.”

Greywing’s New SeaGPT Solves Email Overwhelm for Maritime Crew Managers

Tech Crunch (4/24, Shu) reports that every time a member of their crew changes, maritime crew managers need to handle immigration regulations, COVID requirements and travel plans for each person. This is usually done through emails with port agents, and can quickly lead to an overwhelming number of messages, sent across multiple time zones, especially if multiple people are leaving or onboarding. To simplify the process, Greywing, the Singapore-based maritime intelligence platform backed by investors like Flexport and Y Combinator, announced today it has developed SeaGPT, an AI chatbot based on GPT4 tech. In a statement, Greywing CEO Nick Clarke said email overwhelm is the top problem crew managers ask them to fix. SeaGPT is latest of the startup’s tools for automating crew changes. The current version (Greywing plans to continue developing it and adding new use cases) simplifies the process by automating parts of the communication process, like drafting emails with important questions and extracting the most essential information from port agency replies for specific crew members. Greywing co-founder and chief technology officer Hrishi Olickel told TechCrunch that SeaGPT isn’t a plug-and-play generative AI chatbot, but was made possible by advancements with GPT4

and a maritime-specific approach to programming. He added that email overload affects how many vessels a crew manager can handle at a time and their ability to gather information for decisions. "If a single decision, like a port agent for a single crew change, has information spread out over seven emails and replies inside PDFs and Excel files, the chances for human error are higher. In addition, maritime is a global industry. When time zones aren't favorable, crew managers either have to be available 24/7 or face multi-day turnaround times for a conversation."

Maryland: 'Offshore Wind Capital of America': What's in Environmental Bills Signed by Wes Moore

Capital News Service (4/24, Hood) reports that Gov. Wes Moore signed four key environmental bills Friday, attacking air quality and setting the stage for more approvals on the host of environmental legislation approved by the General Assembly this session. Moore signed the bills at an event at Tradepoint Atlantic in Sparrows Point, a "global logistics" center uniting roads, rails and ports, and where Ørsted's wind energy facility is under development. "Because of the work happening today at Tradepoint Atlantic, Maryland is on track to become the offshore wind capital of America; it's happening through this partnership with Ørsted, which is going to capture enough wind to power 300,000 homes, create 125 good-paying union jobs, and build a cleaner and greener world," Moore said in a statement from his office. "Together we will build on the great work of our partners at Tradepoint Atlantic, Ørsted, and U.S. Wind to build the clean energy future we want to see in Maryland." Developments like MARWIN I and Momentum Wind by US Wind represent a projected 77 turbines 15 to 18 miles off the coast of Maryland and Delaware, including off the coast of Ocean City. Ørsted also plans on two developments of its own with Skipjack Wind I and II. The total of 69 turbines would be situated 20 to 21 miles off the coast of Maryland and Delaware. Senate President Bill Ferguson, D-Baltimore City, attended the signing and tweeted that the new laws set the state on a "path of achieving our decarbonization goals and (spurring) our state's economy in years ahead." Bay Journal (4/24, Wheeler) provides additional coverage.

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National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Washington Post: San Francisco Is a Postcard from a Driverless Car Future. Here's What It's Like.

Washington Post (4/24, Kelly) reports that when the dense, iconic fog rolled in over the residential neighborhood of Balboa Terrace on a recent Tuesday, five matching white SUVs covered in cameras ground to a halt. Confused by the drop in visibility, the Google-owned electric Jaguar I-PACEs tried to pull over and wait out the weather — creating a brief traffic jam. But there was no one inside to yell at. The cars were empty autonomous cars run by software. It was just another day in the life of San Franciscans, who have noticed a sudden increase in the empty vehicles roaming the streets over the past few months. Google-owned Waymo and General Motors' Cruise are some of the companies testing their autonomous technology here, training the cars on how to share the roads with less predictable humans and navigate real world situations. It's happening in other cities as well, including Phoenix, Austin and parts of Los Angeles, and the companies have plans to expand to more locations in the coming year. While the vehicles have been tested here since 2018, they've more recently been allowed to drive around on roads during the daytime without safety drivers — people who are paid to be on standby in the driver's seat in case something goes wrong. Waymo started one year ago, Cruise at the end of 2021, though they've been steadily increasing the numbers. That's led to an uptick in incidents, residents say, from harmless traffic jams to accidents such as the rear-ending of a public bus.

Living adjacent to Silicon Valley, San Franciscans are used to being beta test subjects for Big Tech.

They've previously been privy to the launch of Uber and ride hailing, Airbnb short-term rentals, dockless electric scooters and sidewalk robots. But some residents are starting to question that arrangement, particularly as driverless-vehicle companies eye a next phase: offering rides to people in more places, 24 hours a day. "Tech companies see us as this place where they can find a higher tolerance for their shenanigans," said Marita Murphy, 40, who works in audio production in the city. "I don't feel, as someone who lives out here, that I have any control or say over that. It feels like we're beholden to the will of these companies and their moneymaking motives." Waymo acknowledged the fog-induced traffic jam and said its cars briefly pulled over for safety. Cruise is developing the technology to provide safer and more affordable green transportation options, said spokesman Drew Pusateri.

Call Me a Dummy Feminist

An opinion piece in *Washington Examiner* (4/24, Carney) argues that plenty of online conservatives, maybe sick of the way politicians and the media are obsessed over "representation" and attempts to gender-neutralize the Spanish language, rolled their eyes at the notion that the federal government should care about the sex of crash-test dummies. But the federal government is already very involved in the crash-test dummy game. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration requires cars to test their crashworthiness with dummies. The dummies are heavily engineered products that try to emulate humans' weight, limbs, size, joints, and flexibility. But to date, the dummies used in the United States are basically all modeled after men. Why does that matter? Let crash survivors Maria Kuhn and Hana Schank give just one example: "The neck musculature of an average woman contains far less column strength and muscle mass than a man's, making women 22.1% more likely to suffer a head injury than men. The current standards are designed to prevent men's heads from smashing into the dashboard and do that quite effectively, reducing 70% of whiplash in men. For women, however, the seat belts and airbags that protect men can actually cause additional injury."

Does this have real-world consequences? It seems so. Women who are in a car crash are much more likely to die than men who are in car crashes. "Fatality risk is, on average, 17.0 ... percent higher for a female than for a male of the same age," NHTSA reported in 2013. (Yes, more men die in crashes overall, but that's because men get into many more crashes. Men and women drive differently thanks to the meaningful natural differences between the sexes.) Some of women's higher crash-fatality rate is probably due to women generally driving smaller cars. But the fact that automakers engineer their crash protection for male physiques seems very likely to play some sort of role. There's a sad phenomenon on the Right that I've noticed for nearly 20 years. You could call it gender-symmetry-misogyny, though maybe misogyny is too harsh. It's the phenomenon of conservative-leaning men decrying any accommodation for women, even holding open a door or paying child support, and citing "equality" as the reason. Yes, there are some feminists who deny that men and women naturally have significant differences in personality, emotionality, and physiology, and so that our behaviors and culture shouldn't differentiate between the sexes. But those feminists are wrong. And it makes no sense to refuse to be a gentleman just because there are some prominent and very wrong feminists. Likewise, we shouldn't have knee-jerk negative reactions to liberal feminists such as Rosa DeLauro pushing for better accommodation of women. Sure, maybe you could prove that some female-dummy advocates preach radical gender equity elsewhere, but then they would only be wrong elsewhere, not necessarily here. When someone who is often wrong says something right — in this case, that the differences between men and women are natural and significant — we should agree with that person.

EPA's Electric Vehicle Plan Would Hurt Working-Class Car Buyers

An opinion piece in *Chicago Tribune* (4/24, Murray) argues that it should come as no surprise that President Joe Biden's administration has now hatched a plan to push more electric vehicles into the mainstream. An Environmental Protection Agency plan calls for electric vehicles to compose two-thirds of new car sales by 2032, largely by making gasoline cars too costly to buy. It is, in effect, a tacit

admission that EVs aren't yet ready to compete with entry-level gasoline cars on their own merits. For many, this is hard to believe. During the past decade, we've been told that the electric vehicle is on the cusp of broad adoption, awaiting only a few minor tweaks to its battery. But while we've been waiting, the tweaks haven't sufficed, and the modern electric car is still predominantly a product for the wealthy. EVs, it seems, still can't compete with the low-priced Civics and Corollas of the world. And those vehicles continue to make up a large percentage of global auto sales. The EV's evolution has been slow. And it may continue to be slow. It goes without saying that someone in the Biden administration recognized this and decided to push the panic button. The U.S. Energy Information Administration also apparently saw this in March, when it released a report stating that EV sales would reach just 15% by 2030 and just 19% by 2050.

But by tilting the playing field, we would now have a different ballgame. For many years, it's been assumed that the electric car would come down in cost until it reached price parity with the gasoline car. But the new EPA mechanism calls for the reverse: reaching parity, not by lowering the price of the EV, but by raising the price of the gasoline car. In the process, we now hope for 78% of sedans, 68% of pickups and 62% of SUVs to be electric by 2032. The rationale for this is climate change, of course. That being the case, the more honest message would be, "We want to curb greenhouse gas production, and we know we can't compete with your Toyota Corolla, so we're going to force you to buy an electric vehicle." But we'll never hear that. Voters don't like being forced. So we instead hear about how great this transition will be for consumers. But it won't be, especially for working-class buyers of entry-level trucks and sedans. Unlike the wealthy, many of whom buy EVs to display their values, these buyers will be hurt. Low-end gasoline vehicles in the \$25,000 range will almost certainly rise in cost — a lot. All of this could be avoided, of course, if the EV were able to compete with gasoline cars on an initial-cost basis. But there is no schedule for this. Past predictions have been repeatedly inaccurate, sometimes wildly so. The electric car, it seems, has always been five years away from glory. So now we have an EPA plan to solve this dilemma. It's a fix for a century-old technology struggling toward prime time. By handicapping the competition, the plan could make it possible for the electric car to finally reach its five-year goal of glory.

New York: Lawsuit Against Kia, Hyundai to Be Filed by Rochester

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle (4/24, Canine) reports that the City of Rochester plans to file a lawsuit against Kia and Hyundai, alleging that the lack of anti-theft technology in some cars sold by the two manufacturers are taxing city resources and putting public safety at risk. Kia and Hyundai vehicles make up nearly 75% of 1,063 cars stolen across the city this year, according to Rochester Police Chief David Smith. At this time last year, police recorded 387 stolen vehicles. Most of the car thefts target 2011-2021 key-started Kias and Hyundais, which were manufactured without an engine immobilizer, making them easier to steal. A viral social media video exposed the security flaw, resulting in an uptick of thefts across the country. "This problem is out of control and these costs should not be borne by the city, our residents or our businesses," Mayor Malik Evans said at a press conference announcing the lawsuit Monday. "Rochester requires restitution to compensate for the manufacturers that chose to cut corners and leave these vehicles susceptible to theft." The city will seek an unspecified amount in damages related to law enforcement resources diverted to chase down thefts, Corporation Counsel Linda Kingsley said. The Seattle-based law firm Keller Rohrbach will represent the city alongside other municipalities in a multidistrict lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California, where the two car manufacturers have U.S. headquarters. Kingsley said it is the first set of lawsuits filed by municipalities against Kia and Hyundai. The group includes Buffalo, Seattle, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Milwaukee, Madison and St. Louis. Chief Smith said the stolen vehicles are often used in other crimes. Of 20 "smash and grab" burglaries of city businesses this year, 19 were done using stolen Kia and Hyundais, Smith said. Rochester Beacon (4/24, Astor), WROC (4/24, Gandy), WIVB (4/24, Napier), WHYC (4/24,

Moussignac) and Spectrum News (4/24, Penale) provide additional coverage.

GM Recalls 40,000 Silverado Pickups Over Fire Risk

Washington Post (4/24, Gregg) reports that General Motors is recalling roughly 40,000 Chevrolet Silverado trucks over concerns that brake fluid could leak, raising the risk of fire, federal regulators said. Owners should park their pickups outside and away from structures until repairs have been made, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The recall includes the Silverado 4500HD, 5500HD and 6500HD from the 2019 to 2023 model years. GM, which notified regulators of the issue earlier this month, is unaware of any injuries or accidents related to the recall, the regulator said. The issue is tied to the vehicle's brake pressure sensor assembly, which could allow brake fluid to leak into the brake pressure switch and cause an electrical short-circuit. That in turn could overheat the circuit, creating a fire risk whether the vehicle is being driven or parked. Chevrolet dealers are to replace the cylinder pressure sensor and inspect the wire harness, replacing it if necessary. Any replacements should occur free of charge, the federal agency said. USA Today (4/24, Mendoza), The Hill (4/24, Oshin), Cleveland Plain Dealer (4/24, Mentz), Freight Waves (4/24, Adler) and W.W. (4/24, Naquin) provide additional coverage.

Wall Street Journal: Toyota Pitches a New Prius as Plug-In Hybrids Battle EVs for Share

Wall Street Journal (4/24, Davis) reports that Toyota is getting ready to bring its latest plug-in hybrid model to American showrooms next month, a part of the company's bet that plug-ins can be the bridge between traditional cars and electric vehicles. Toyota, Ford Motor Co. and Hyundai Motor Co. are among global brands rolling out new plug-in hybrid gas-electric cars. While most hybrids on the road today combine gas engines with electric motors to save fuel, plug-in hybrids can drive primarily on batteries—with the engine as a backup—making them the closest thing to a full EV on the road. Toyota is rebranding its plug-ins as “practical electric vehicles” that work for average American commuters who want to drive mostly on electric power but worry about range on longer trips. Its 2023 Prius Prime plug-in, which will start to arrive at U.S. dealers in May, is capable of driving up to 44 miles on a battery alone. For many environmental groups, plug-in hybrids still aren't good enough because they burn fossil fuel. Some industry analysts aren't sure plug-ins are a great business opportunity either, given the fast-rising interest in pure EVs made by Tesla Inc. and others. One of the biggest risks for the plug-in market comes from regulators in places like California who are moving to limit or exclude plug-in hybrids from rules mandating a transition to electric. Toyota's recently appointed chief executive, Koji Sato, made the case for plug-in hybrids on Friday. “There are regions that are moving speedily toward EVs and others that are taking more time,” Mr. Sato said. Investing in plug-in hybrids “is a practical way in which we can shift toward electrified vehicles,” he said.

Tesla Raises 2023 Spending Forecast as It Races to Ramp Up Output

Reuters (4/24) reports that Tesla raised its capital expenditure forecast for 2023 on Monday as the automaker ramps up output at its factories to take advantage of the rising interest in electric vehicles. The company, led by Elon Musk, said in a filing that it expects to spend between \$7 billion and \$9 billion this year, higher than its previous outlook of \$6 billion to \$8 billion. It maintained the spending outlook for the next two years at \$7 billion to \$9 billion. Tesla's shares fell 3.3% in morning trade. The world's most valuable automaker has been raising its production aggressively as it prioritizes sales growth ahead of profit in a weak economy and works towards CEO Musk's bold goal of selling 20 million electric vehicles in 2030. Achieving that goal will make Tesla twice the size of any automaker in history, accounting for roughly 20% of the global vehicle market. The company in January earmarked \$3.6 billion to expand its Nevada gigafactory complex, where Tesla will mass produce its long-delayed Semi truck and build a plant for the 4680 cell that will be able to make enough batteries for 2 million light-duty vehicles annually. The company is also ramping up output at its factories in Berlin and Austin, and plans

to open a gigafactory in Mexico as the EV behemoth pushes to expand its global output.

Only 10 Carmakers Will Survive Global EV Battle, Says Tesla Rival Xpeng

Financial Times (4/24, Li, White) reports that the world's car industry will shrink to only 10 companies over the coming decade, a Chinese rival to Elon Musk's Tesla has said, as intense competition in China's electric vehicle market spills on to the global stage. Brian Gu, vice-chair of Guangzhou-headquartered Xpeng, said for Chinese companies to be among the last carmakers standing, they would need to have annual sales of at least 3mn vehicles, underpinned by global exports. The world's largest carmaker Toyota sold 10.5mn cars in 2022, while Tesla sold 1.3mn. The warning comes at a historic juncture for the global car industry. China is on the cusp of overtaking Japan as the world's biggest exporter of cars by volume after passing Germany last year. At the same time, slowing growth and an intense price war is pushing low-cost carmakers to the brink of collapse in China, the world's biggest car market. "To be in that '3mn club' you cannot be a China-only player, you have to be a global player. We think in that scenario, maybe close to half your volume is coming from outside of China," Gu said in an interview with the Financial Times. "In five to 10 years, it's going to be a much more concentrated market. I think the [number] of players will probably be reduced to less than 10 at the global stage," said Gu.

Gu acknowledged that deteriorating US-China relations complicated the company's overseas expansion plans. Xpeng, which is backed by Alibaba and has invested heavily in autonomous driving, is targeting growth in Europe this year but does not have immediate plans to sell cars in the US. Entering the US for Chinese brands "may be difficult today", Gu said. "We need to take time to study it and find a way to access that market." Despite the challenges, Gu said the company saw "plenty of growth opportunities outside of China". Xpeng, as with all Chinese electric-car producers, depends on US chip designers including Nvidia and Qualcomm for advanced semiconductors. This has fuelled concerns that Chinese carmakers could be exposed as the US government expands restrictions on China's access to cutting-edge US chip technology. "So far, none of our partnerships has been impacted by any of the political noise," he said, adding that, if the restrictions did start to have an impact on the company, "the whole China industry will find a solution".

GM, Ford Strive to Convince Investors: No Price War with Tesla

Reuters (4/24, White) reports that GM and Ford will try to convince Wall Street when they release first-quarter earnings this week that they will not be dragged into a price war with electric vehicle maker Tesla. So far, investors remain unconvinced. Shares in GM are down more than 20% from their 2023 peak in February, and are trading close to their 2010 IPO price of \$33 a share. Ford shares are down 13% since February as Tesla CEO Elon Musk has escalated a strategy of squeezing his company's profit margins to expand sales volume. GM reports first-quarter results on Wednesday. This month, the automaker signaled an upbeat outlook with its first quarter U.S. sales report, titled "Off to a Great Start." GM's first-quarter U.S. sales rose 18% from a year ago, with sales of high-margin trucks and SUVs leading the way. At the same time, GM CEO Mary Barra is accelerating a drive to cut operating costs by \$2 billion by year end. Chief Financial Officer Paul Jacobson told investors this month that 5,000 GM employees people had accepted severance deals. So far, GM has been slow to ramp up in production of its newest EVs, with just 968 Cadillac Lyriq EVs delivered in the first quarter. In the near term, that could help the company dodge the impact of Tesla's price cuts, J.P. Morgan analyst Ryan Brinkman wrote in a note Monday. "GM and Ford should see drastically better trends in pricing and resulting margin impacts than did Tesla" in the first quarter, Brinkman wrote. However, he added, investors are concerned that "weakness in EV pricing could spread beyond Tesla to other automakers' electric vehicles and — much more importantly — into the broader market for new vehicles generally." Ford, which reports first-quarter results on May 2, also reported strong first-quarter truck sales in the U.S. - with deliveries of F-150 pickup trucks jumping 21% from year ago levels, depressed by semiconductor shortages. The first-quarter report will be the debut for Ford's new financial reporting approach, reflecting its broader

restructuring. The company will report results for its Model e electric vehicle business, Ford Blue combustion vehicle operations and Ford Pro commercial vehicle unit. In a briefing last month, Ford signaled its EV unit could lose \$3 billion before taxes this year.

China's DriveGPT Is Here. Time to Play Catch-Up

An opinion piece in *Bloomberg* (4/24, Trivedi) argues that China's artificial intelligence-powered autonomous-vehicle market is showing serious promise. So, of course, Elon Musk wants a piece of it, especially since he's struggled to get self-driving technology off the ground in the US. That may not pan out as well as the Tesla Inc. chief executive officer's Beijing-backed electric-vehicle bet. Local media say Tesla could be getting ready to test its full self-driving technology in China. Given the firm's FSD track record in the US, that's a scary and unsafe prospect. In May 2021, Tesla announced it was eliminating critical radars on new cars. It then started disabling them in vehicles already on the road, resulting in an uptick in crashes, the *Washington Post* reported. In February, it paused the rollout of FSD. Suffice to say, the global EV frontrunner has hit roadblocks on AVs. Presumably, the hope is that a turn to China will help accelerate its ambitions.

That's unlikely. Even if Tesla is allowed to test its FSD in China, domestic players are speeding ahead, leaving it to play catch up. Bolstered by Beijing's blueprint for connected and intelligent cars, companies like Pony.ai Inc. and Baidu Inc. have been operating robotaxis in designated areas in Beijing and Shanghai after jumping past high regulatory hurdles. Several other AI-powered auto software firms are working on advanced autonomous driving technologies, including high-definition maps, smart cockpits and so-called V2X, or vehicle-to-everything networks, that rely on sensors, cameras and the internet to keep drivers informed about road conditions. The AI-backed advances have put China's auto and related software industry leagues ahead of competitors. The market for intelligent vehicles is forecast to grow to almost \$100 billion by the end of this decade. As of 2022, almost 30% of cars came with a high level of assisted driving features and over the next three years that's expected to rise to 70%. It isn't just companies talking big on technology. Consumers want more features, too. Tesla going in with an entry-level offering won't cut it. To be sure, firms are still trying to workout profitable and sustainable models to keep the momentum going.

A big part of the AI-focused push in the car and logistics industries can be credited to Beijing's early efforts on policy design and iterative regulation. The guidelines have been sharpened, addressing everything from technical to liability issues. Last year, draft rules were released to encourage faster commercialization. Cities and provinces are working on more intricate versions specific to the conditions in their areas. Shanghai tightened legislation that went into effect this past February. In Beijing, a list of firms qualified to conduct autonomous-vehicle road tests was released recently, along with permits for robotaxis. Several automakers are partnering with AI firms so that they don't fall behind, while regulators trying to put in place safety measures appear to have sacrificed innovation and oversight. Car companies in the US can, for instance, self-certify that they comply with guidelines. For Musk's Tesla and other automakers following the shift to greater autonomy, it will be important to track China's AI path if they are to keep up. Already, firms in Europe are relying on Chinese companies like Thunder Software Technology Co. for smarter cars. Much like EVs, where China zeroed in on batteries and effectively set the global standard by leading on policy, AVs may end up following Beijing's AI rules. Brace yourselves.

Florida: Stolen Hyundai Used in Crash That Kills One

Spectrum News (4/24, Rauch, Duerig) reports that emergency workers responded to a wreck that killed one person and sent six teenagers to the hospital early Sunday morning. Officials with the Florida Highway Patrol say six teens were cruising down Dean Road at a high rate of speed in a stolen Hyundai Santa Fe when they reportedly ran a red light and hit another vehicle, killing its driver. The Hyundai Santa Fe involved in Sunday's deadly crash belongs to a certain group of Hyundai and Kia vehicles that

don't have engine immobilizers: A mechanism that stops a vehicle's engine from starting up unless the car's ignition key is present. Officials say a car without an engine immobilizer is easier to steal, which is why Highway Loss Data Institute reports that Hyundai and Kia cars made between 2015-2019 are being stolen at nearly twice the rate of cars produced by all other manufacturers.

But the problem goes back even further than 2015, according to the Center for Auto Safety, a government watchdog group. "Kia and Hyundai had not been installing immobilizers on most of their vehicles for decades before that," said Michael Brooks, the Center for Auto Safety's executive director. "A lot of manufacturers started in the late '90s, mid-2000s, but Kia and Hyundai did not." "(That) opened them up to this problem: a hack of some sort that allows anyone to break into a vehicle, open up the steering column, insert a USB cable and start the car without a key," Brooks said. But according to Brooks, the automakers aren't breaking any federal laws. "I think the Department of Transportation is somewhat at fault here, because they're the ones who left the option not to have an immobilizer," Brooks said. "Basically, the government said you have a choice: you can either mark your parts for theft protection purposes, or you can put an immobilizer on the vehicle."

Brooks said he believes Kia and Hyundai went for the "parts marking" option as a cost-saving measure. He said the most effective way to address the problem would be through a federal recall, which would need to come from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). But those federal recalls are very rare, Brooks said. The much more common type of recall is voluntary, and comes from the auto manufacturer. "NHTSA's role rarely is to order or issue a recall on their own — they mostly rely on manufacturers to do that," Brooks said. "When NHTSA does it, it's because a manufacturer has been particularly bad, in a way that requires NHTSA to use its legal authorities. We probably would argue they should do that a lot more. But in this case, they haven't done that yet." Spectrum News asked NHTSA why a federal recall for the problematic vehicles hadn't yet been issued. In response, the agency provided a written statement which reads in part: "Since last year, NHTSA has repeatedly met with Hyundai and Kia to discuss the causes contributing to the theft vulnerability, review the scope of differing software and hardware in the affected models, and receive regular updates on the companies' action plans."

Illinois: Traffic Deaths Dip Slightly in 2022, but Fatalities Are Still Above Pre-Pandemic Levels: 'Not a Cause to Celebrate.'

Chicago Sun-Times (4/24, Camarillo) reports that the number of people killed on Illinois roadways dipped slightly last year compared with 2021, but experts say safety improvements are still needed as deaths remain above pre-pandemic levels. The number of fatalities in Illinois dropped from 1,334 in 2021 to 1,280 in 2022, which represents a 4% decrease, according to estimates from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. But Kavi Bhalla, a University of Chicago professor who researches road safety, said the numbers don't represent a meaningful decline. "The road death toll in Illinois went up dramatically during the pandemic," Bhalla said in an email. "Fatalities have declined very slightly this year. It's not a cause to celebrate." In 2019, Illinois saw 1,009 traffic fatalities, according to NHTSA. That number jumped to 1,194 in 2020. In 2018, 1,035 people died in motor vehicles crashes in the state, and 1,097 in 2017. Dave Simmons, executive director of Ride Illinois, a biking advocacy organization, said the slight decrease in 2022 deaths is encouraging, "but the number of people dying on our nation's roads is still incredibly high." "Fewer people being injured or killed on Illinois roads is notable, but not cause for celebration," Simmons continued, adding that the decline could probably be attributed to the implementation of federal programs like Safe Streets and Roads for All. The programs fund regional and local initiatives through grants to prevent roadway deaths and serious injuries. Simmons hopes Chicago can put money toward the Department of Transportation's Complete Streets vision, which aims to design and build streets with safe access for all users. His group urged the U.S. Transportation

Department and the Illinois Department of Transportation, "municipalities and other decision makers to heavily invest in Complete Streets and safe infrastructure for vulnerable road users to ensure that this recent trend continues," Simmons said. *Automotive News* (4/24, LaForest) provides additional coverage.

New York: NYC Council Considers Bills to Improve Bicycle Safety, Deputize Citizens to Crack Down on Violations

WABC (4/24) reports that city council members introduced several new pieces of legislation they say would better protect cyclists and the NYPD was on the hot seat with one council member accusing officers of contributing to the issue of biker safety. It's no secret that biking in the city is at an all-time high, but the number of accidents and deaths on city streets is also on the rise. At least 10 cyclists have been killed so far this year. The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure discussed new bills that would eliminate red tape when it comes to expanding bike lanes and create a real-time map of current bikeway conditions. Another bill would create a task force to lay the groundwork to build public e-bike charging stations to get lithium-ion batteries out of people's homes. "Every single one of these fires whether fatality or loss from home is preventable," Councilmember Jennifer Guitterez said. Guitterez introduced the task force bill to figure out what it would take to build public e-bike charging stations across the city. "We would love to have a good sense of not just how much it will cost to install and operate but also what it would cost for someone needing to charge their bike so those are all the things we hope to get out of the task force," Guitterez said.

Councilmember Lincoln Restler introduced legislation that would essentially deputize citizens to help crack down on traffic violations that make it unsafe for cyclists. Restler pointed to police being the main culprits, a comment that did not go over well with the NYPD during the meeting. "The idea that there is any enforcement or accountability behind this is a joke," Councilmember Lincoln Restler said. "It's not a joke I do take it seriously you're welcome to text me a photo of this issue and I will deal with it ASAP," a member of the NYPD said during the meeting. "The very worst perpetrators are police officers themselves," Restler said. "You can go to any police precinct in the city and you will find at least a dozen cars parked illegally on sidewalks in bike lanes. Making it unsafe for the community to get around." Restler questioned how officers could enforce a law he said that they aren't following themselves, which is why he proposed empowering citizens.

Washington: Legislature Abandons Most Traffic Safety Bills as Fatalities Continue to Mount

The Urbanist (4/24, Packer) notes that in late January, a group of lawmakers from both the Washington House and Senate, Democrats and Republicans, joined Governor Jay Inslee in a legislative conference room to announce that reducing traffic deaths on the state's roadways would be a major priority for the 105-day legislative session. Looming over the group was a large poster, depicting the number of lives lost in Washington by year: the chart spiked in 2022, with an estimated 745 fatalities. "It's a painful thing to know that 745 people did not get home safely last year, and that those numbers have increased the last couple of years," Governor Inslee said that day. "The good news is, we have a team assembled behind me, and I believe in the state legislature, this year they will take significant steps to reduce this carnage on our highways." A laundry list of bills intended to reverse the alarming trend were discussed, touching on everything from driving under the influence, driver training, and (some) systemic infrastructure changes. But that number of 745 was not final, with records still being reviewed even through today.

Just last week, the Washington Traffic Safety Commission held its quarterly meeting, and the update was even more sobering. Staci Hoff, the commission's research director, confirmed that the number was at 751 as of that meeting...and still climbing. The tally increases as people who were involved in crashes but passed away after-the-fact in hospitals were added to the official count. "I believe our final 2022 number

will land anywhere between 760 to 770 when we finish our operations," she said. In 2022, 670 people had been killed by traffic violence, which then had been a high number not seen since the 1990s. Yet 2022 was projected to be higher by around 100. Hoff's bad news did not stop there. "2023 is very much looking like the first half of 2022, which was historically bad in those early months of the year," Hoff said. "I anticipate at this time that the first quarter of 2023 will also end up being higher than 2022." If anything, the issue has become more urgent since January. But now that the legislature has wrapped up its session, we see the result: many of the bills touted at the January press conference were either left behind or watered down, with other pressing issues like housing, firearms access, and education dominating much of the Legislature's floor and committee time.

Nevada: More Motorcycles on the Road, Law Enforcement Says Stay Vigilant

KOII (4/24, Grams) reports that flowers are blooming and the sun is out, that means more drivers and riders are on the road. "With the increase in the weather temperature, we expect to see an abundance of motorcycles out on the Nevada highways," said Nevada Highway Patrol Lieutenant Laprairie. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says motorcyclists are 28 times more likely to die in a crash, compared to those in a car. "Motorcyclists in general are hard to be seen because of their smaller size, so drivers need to be on the lookout for them," said Sparks Police Sergeant Congdon. Congdon and Laprairie say drivers need to pay attention. "Always use your turn signal, check your mirrors, check your blind spot," said Lt. Laprairie. "Don't just assume a vehicle is going to turn just because they have their turn signal on." But Sergeant Congdon says these crashes aren't always the driver's fault. In recent investigations, Sparks Police have found that motorcyclists often put themselves in danger. "A lot of these accidents are caused by motorcyclists driving reckless, going over the speed limit and they're not able to stop in time when they do perceive a threat in front of them," Congdon said. While the Nevada Office of Traffic Safety says roadway deaths are down 19 percent, riders should always protect themselves. "Make sure that your helmet is a DOT approved helmet," Congdon said. "[Wear] your gloves, boots, long pants, jacket so if you are to go down, it protects you a little bit more," Laprairie said.

Michelin Recalls 500,000 Tires Over Traction Concerns

Scissors's News (4/24) reports that hundreds of thousands of car owners may want to check the tires on their vehicles. Michelin announced that it's recalling more than 500,000 tires because they may not provide enough traction in certain situations and cause a crash. The recall involves Agilis CrossClimate C-Metric tires with DOT codes 0117 through 1423, the notice says. "The tires are labeled as snow tires, but do not have sufficient traction to perform in all snow weather conditions," a notice with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says. The company did not report whether any crashes or injuries have been linked to the tires, which were reportedly tested under the improper tire pressure. Owners should be getting letters in the mail in June about the safety risk of continuing to drive on the tires. Michelin says it's still working on a remedy, but tires will be replaced free of charge.

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Office of Research and Technology/ Bureau of Transportation Statistics

U.S. OKs Spectrum Use for Vehicle Crash Prevention Technology

Reuters (4/24, Shepardson) reports that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) on Monday approved a request by U.S. state agencies, some automakers, universities and others to use spectrum to deploy connected vehicle technology to prevent crashes, especially at intersections. The 5.9 GHz spectrum block was reserved in 1999 for automakers to develop technology for vehicles to communicate with each other to avoid crashes but has so far gone largely unused. The waiver request to use so-called Cellular Vehicle-to-Everything (C-V2X) technology was filed in late 2021 by Volkswagen AG's Audi, Ford Motor Co, Jaguar Land Rover, Utah and Virginia's transportation departments, Harman

International, Panasonic Corp and others. The technology, if widely used in U.S. vehicles, could prevent at least 600,000 crashes annually, government studies show. The waivers are "a missing piece of the regulatory puzzle needed for automakers to deploy V2X," said Hilary Cain, an official with the Alliance for Automotive Innovation in a statement. She called it "a game-changing wireless safety technology enabling vehicles to see around corners, talk to other vehicles and communicate – in real-time – with pedestrians, bicyclists, traffic lights and infrastructure." "As deaths on our nation's roadways continue to soar, it is critical that we maximize use of connected vehicle technology to keep all road users safe," Intelligent Transportation Society of America CEO Laura Chace said in a statement. Chace urged finalizing rules to "establish a framework of spectrum regulatory certainty that enables investment in and deployment of these important safety solutions."

This Machine Learning Project Could Help Jumpstart Self-Driving Cars Again

ZDNet (4/24, Rao) reports that based on all the hype around autonomous vehicles (AVs) in recent years, you would imagine that our roads would be crisscrossed by swarms of driverless cars by now, ferrying their owners to their next destination, while they try and discern real news from fake on their mobile phones in the back seat. However, convoys of autonomous trucks or fleets of autonomous taxis or passenger cars have not really materialized as per the breathless hype from a few years ago. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety expects a paltry 3.5 million self-driving vehicles to ply U.S. roads by 2025. That number inches up to 4.5 million by 2030 -- and, even here, experts doesn't expect these vehicles to be whizzing about on their own steam and will instead rely on their human counterparts to make crucial decisions. So, what's holding autonomous vehicles back? Believe it or not, for all the millions of miles these self-driving cars have driven for testing purposes, and all the sensors and hyper-detailed urban mapping they have been equipped with, autonomous cars just don't seem to be able to do the one essential thing that they should -- predict the glorious unpredictability of other erratic humans. "The safety performance of these automated driving vehicles, even with a state-of-the-art, automated driving system, is not on par with human drivers right now," Henry Liu, professor of civil engineering at University of Michigan, told ZDNET. Liu is also director of M-City -- a 32-acre mock city on campus that tests autonomous vehicles -- and head of the Center for Connected and Automated Transportation, funded by the US Department of Transportation. The main problem dogging AVs, as described by Liu, is a "curse of rarity" -- the fact that encountering accidents on your daily drive happens very infrequently. It takes hundreds of millions, maybe billions, of miles of driving by autonomous vehicles to encounter a few accidents and learn from them.

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Pipeline & Hazardous Materials Safety Administration

Virginia, West Virginia: Granholm Backs Mountain Valley Pipeline; Landowners' Lawsuit Against MVP Revived by U.S. Supreme Court

E&E News (4/24, Willson, Anchondo) notes that the Biden administration has thrown its weight behind the Mountain Valley pipeline, a major natural gas project favored by West Virginia Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin and opposed by environmental advocates. The 303-mile pipeline and other natural gas projects like it will "play an important role" in supporting the transition to clean energy and in safeguarding the energy system, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said in a letter Friday evening to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. "Energy infrastructure, like the MVP project, can help ensure the reliable delivery of energy that heats homes and businesses, and powers electric generators that support the reliability of the electric system," Granholm said in the letter.

The letter comes as the administration is planning to release new rules to curb greenhouse gas emissions from power plants. Those rules are expected to require coal and natural gas generators to

include technologies to capture most of their planet-warming emissions. “I think the timing is interesting in that it’s ahead of the release of the new power plant rules, in the sense that it’s an indication that the administration is still supportive of the role of natural gas,” said Paul Bledsoe, a strategic adviser at the Progressive Policy Institute and a former White House climate aide.

The Hill (4/24, Frazin) adds that Granholm, in her letter to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), said the pipeline, which would carry natural gas from West Virginia to Virginia, “will enhance the Nation’s critical infrastructure for energy and national security.” However, she stopped short of fully endorsing it, saying that the department “takes no position” on outstanding agency actions or litigation related to the project. Yet, she also requests that any action related to the pipeline “proceeds expeditiously.” More broadly, Granholm wrote that natural gas “can play an important role as part of the clean energy transition” particularly when combined with carbon capture technology to mitigate planet-warming emissions.

In the past, the Biden administration has expressed support for Manchin legislation that included expedited approval for the pipeline, as part of a larger permitting reform effort. Unlike the broad support the administration had given to the permitting effort, Granholm’s letter specifically singles out the pipeline project. Her letter drew condemnation from environmental advocates. WV Public Broadcasting (4/24, Tate) also reports.

Landowners' Lawsuit Against Mountain Valley Pipeline Revived by U.S. Supreme Court

Meanwhile, The Roanoke Times (4/24, Hammack) reports that a long-running legal battle over the Mountain Valley Pipeline’s power to take private land gained new life Monday from the U.S. Supreme Court, which revived a lawsuit filed by property owners. In a brief order, the high court vacated a U.S. District Court judge’s earlier finding that he lacked jurisdiction to hear a case that challenged the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission’s delegation of eminent domain authority to the private venture. The lawsuit brought by six landowners in Franklin, Montgomery and Roanoke counties was sent back for a trial on its merits.

“This was an uphill battle and today marks a huge win for landowners,” said their attorney, Mia Yugo of Roanoke. The high court agrees to hear only about 1% of the thousands of requests for appeals it receives each year. In contesting the condemnation of their land for the natural gas pipeline, the plaintiffs argued that eminent domain — which should be a legislative power — was improperly delegated by Congress to FERC.

It was unclear what immediate impact the Supreme Court’s decision would have on Mountain Valley, which has already taken possession of the land that many property owners refused to sell for the controversial, 303-mile pipeline. One possibility for the landowners — Cletus and Beverly Bohon of Montgomery County, Wendell and Mary Flora of Franklin County and Robert and Aimee Hamm of Roanoke County — would be to ask the court to delay construction while their lawsuit is pending. Such a step is being considered but no decision has been made, Yugo said Monday. Rather than contest FERC’s decision in the Mountain Valley case alone, the lawsuit makes a broader attack on the agency’s authority. It argues that Congress violated the separation of powers by delegating to FERC a power that it was unwilling to exercise on its own.

“Eminent domain is a legislative power, which means only Congress can wield that power,” Yugo said. “And if the project is this unpopular — as it is in Virginia — any congressman voting to take this land would have to face the voters in the next election.” “That is why Congress delegated such sweeping power to the agency in the first place — to avoid accountability to the electorate.”

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National News

Fox News Ousts Tucker Carlson

The Associated Press (04/25, Bauder) reported that Fox News parted ways with Tucker Carlson in a surprising move, saying the pair had "agreed to part ways." Still, they gave no explanation for the dramatic action. The last broadcast of "Tucker Carlson Tonight" aired last Friday. The break from Carlson comes amid a cascade of bad legal news for the network. The Wall Street Journal (04/24, Flint, Simonetti, Hagey) reported that Mr. Carlson, whose contract was renewed in 2021, will be paid out for the rest of his contract, people familiar with the matter said. One of the people said Mr. Carlson is paid about \$20 million a year. The people said Mr. Carlson found out he was being let go about 10 minutes before the network announced his departure. According to the article, Fox's decision to allow Mr. Carlson to go comes less than a week after Fox Corp. agreed to pay \$787.5 million to settle its legal battle with Dominion Voting Systems, which had accused Fox's news networks of airing false claims by hosts and guests that Dominion helped rig the outcome of the 2020 U.S. presidential election in favor of Joe Biden. Mr. Carlson had been expected to testify during the trial. The report adds that Fox took issue with remarks Mr. Carlson made that were derogatory toward the network, people familiar with the matter said. They said that much of the communications were redacted in court documents but became known internally to senior Fox management.

Don Lemon Fired From CNN After Divisive Morning Show Run

The Associated Press (04/24, D'Innocenzio, Coyle) and the Wall Street Journal (04/24, Lukpat, Simonetti) reported that a little over two months after he apologized for comments about Republican candidate Nikki Haley being past her prime on-air, CNN fired longtime host Don Lemon on Monday following his short run as a morning show host. The reports mention that CNN Chairman and Chief Executive Chris Licht said in a companywide email on Monday that Mr. Lemon was departing the network. He didn't give a reason why Mr. Lemon was leaving. Mr. Lemon taped his last show on Monday morning. According to CNN (04/25, Goldman, Darcy), in his own statement, Lemon said his agent told him Monday morning that CNN had terminated him. "I am stunned," Lemon said, arguing that management did not have "the decency" to inform him of his firing directly. "At no time was I ever given any indication that I would not be able to continue to do the work I have loved at the network," Lemon added; CNN rebutted Lemon, calling his version of events "inaccurate." The report stated that he was widely criticized for sexist comments he made on "CNN This Morning" in February. During an on-air discussion about Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley's proposal that older politicians take competency tests, Lemon argued that the 51-year-old Haley "isn't in her prime." Co-anchors Harlow and Collins pushed back, but Lemon doubled down on his point. Licht later sent a memo to CNN staff, calling the comments "unacceptable." Licht said he had a "frank" conversation with Lemon, who apologized and was set to participate in formal training sessions.

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Washington Schedule

White House

President Biden

- 12:00 PM: The President departs the White House
- 12:30 PM: The President discusses how his investing in America agenda is bringing manufacturing

back, rebuilding the middle class, and creating good-paying union jobs

- 1:15 PM: The President departs en route to the White House
- 1:25 PM: The President arrives at the White House
- 3:15 PM: The President receives the Presidential Daily Briefing
- 7:10 PM: The President, The First Lady, and President Yoon and Mrs. Kim of the Republic of Korea depart the White House
- 7:20 PM: The President and The First Lady participate in a visit with President Yoon and Mrs. Kim of the Republic of Korea to the Korean War Memorial
- 7:40 PM: The President and The First Lady depart en route to the White House
- 7:45 PM: The President and The First Lady arrive at the White House

Vice President Harris

- No events scheduled.

U.S. Senate

- Hearings to examine proposed budget estimates and justification for fiscal year 2024 for the Sergeant at Arms and Doorkeeper of the Senate and the United States Capitol Police. – 3:30 PM – Host: Appropriations Committee

U.S. House of Representatives

- Business Meeting: H.R. ____ - Limit Save Grow Act of 2023; H.J. Res. 39 - Disapproving the rule submitted by the Department of Commerce relating to "Procedures Covering Suspension of Liquidation Duties and Estimated Duties in Accord With Presidential Proclamation 10414". – 4:00 PM – Host: Committee on Rules

Other Events

- No events scheduled.

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From: [Soskin, Eric](#)
To: [Jackson, Marshall](#)
Cc: [Ward, Chuck](#); [Smith, Nelda Z.](#)
Subject: RE: Clips for Tuesday, April 9, 2024
Date: Tuesday, April 9, 2024 12:58:00 PM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[image003.png](#)

Thanks, Marshall!

From: Jackson, Marshall <Marshall.Jackson@oig.dot.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, April 9, 2024 12:32 PM
To: Soskin, Eric <Eric.Soskin.IG@oig.dot.gov>
Cc: Ward, Chuck <Chuck.Ward@oig.dot.gov>; Smith, Nelda Z. <Nelda.Z.Smith@oig.dot.gov>
Subject: FW: Clips for Tuesday, April 9, 2024

Eric,

We thought you'd be interested in the article in this morning's clips regarding pilot mental health and the results of a recent aviation rulemaking committee report and recommendations. Notably, our recent audit was featured on page 4 (highlighted) of the attached rulemaking committee report. There's another mention of OIG on page 36 regarding the ARC recommendation to FAA to offer an amnesty program to pilots that report previously unreported conditions to FAA as well.

Regards,
MJ

Marshall Jackson

Program Director – Aviation Audits

Office of Audits & Evaluations

USDOT | Office of Inspector General

(b)(6)

marshall.jackson@oig.dot.gov | www.oig.dot.gov

From: Ward, Chuck <Chuck.Ward@oig.dot.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, April 9, 2024 8:40 AM
To: Smith, Nelda Z. <Nelda.Z.Smith@oig.dot.gov>; Jackson, Marshall <Marshall.Jackson@oig.dot.gov>
Subject: FW: Clips for Tuesday, April 9, 2024

Note pilot mental health article ...

From: Valaitis, Ada <Ada.Valaitis@oig.dot.gov>

Sent: Tuesday, April 9, 2024 8:19 AM

To: OIG/All Employees (b)(6)

Subject: Clips for Tuesday, April 9, 2024

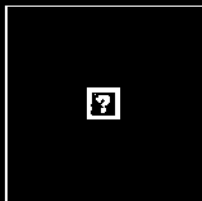




OF PARTICULAR NOTE

- Texas: Exclusive - Biden, Kishida Likely to Discuss Texas Bullet Train Project
- Maryland: Maryland Governor and Members of Congress to Meet to Discuss Support for Rebuilding Collapsed Bridge
- Newest Members of National Transportation Safety Board Sworn In
- Reuters: Airlines Struggle With Lack of Planes as Summer Travel Set to Hit Record Levels
- FAA's 'Cozy' Relationship with Boeing at Issue Again After Alaska Air Blowout
- FAA Reviewing Ways to Remove Barriers Preventing Pilots from Seeking Mental Health Support
- FMCSA Has Rejected 34% of Under-21 Truck Driver Applications
- California: Tesla Heads to Court After Apple Engineer's Family Says Autopilot Caused His Fatal Crash
- Politico: What a Driverless Future Might Look Like
- Senators take another crack at improving federal telework data
- OMB's new guidance, RFI boost grant modernization efforts

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April 09, 2024
Department of Transportation
Daily News Briefing

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- Texas: Exclusive - Biden, Kishida Likely to Discuss Texas Bullet Train Project
- Ohio: US Department of Transportation Awards Cincinnati Funding for Landslide Mitigation

DOT IN THE NEWS

- Maryland: Maryland Governor and Members of Congress to Meet to Discuss Support for Rebuilding Collapsed Bridge
- Congress' Spring Agenda: LNG, Baltimore Bridge, Permitting
- Texas: A Gates-Backed Startup Is Making Fuel from Water and Carbon Dioxide
- New York: Container Ship's Engines Die Outside NYC, Comes to Stop Near Verrazzano Bridge
- New York: Most NYC Infrastructure Projects Are Delayed and Over Budget, State

Comptroller Says

- New York, Editorial: A Missing Vote on the MTA Board: Rockland County's Voice Is Silenced on Congestion Pricing
- Oklahoma: Oklahoma Lawmakers Want More Oversight for Infrastructure Development Funds
- Newest Members of National Transportation Safety Board Sworn In

FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

- Reuters: Airlines Struggle With Lack of Planes as Summer Travel Set to Hit Record Levels
- FAA's 'Cozy' Relationship with Boeing at Issue Again After Alaska Air Blowout
- Spirit Airlines Will Delay Plane Purchases and Furlough Pilots
- Financial Risks Abound as Boeing Tries to Stabilize Itself
- Eclipse Flights Swarm Airports: 'We Had to Close the Runway to Park Planes'
- California: S.F. Says It Will Sue If Oakland Airport Goes Through with Planned Name Change
- Unions Irked as US's Frontier Eyes Business Model Revamp
- FAA Reviewing Ways to Remove Barriers Preventing Pilots from Seeking Mental Health Support
- Flying Cars Aren't Yet Cleared for Takeoff, but Change Is on the Horizon
- Office of Space Commerce Calls for International Cooperation in Space Situational Awareness
- Florida: Orlando International Airport Scores \$61.9 Million Federal Grant
- United Airlines Delays Two New Routes Amid FAA Safety Review
- Florida: St. Augustine's Northeast Florida Regional Airport (NFRA) Welcomes Banyan Air Service
- Minnesota: Mayo One Helicopter Forced to Land After Bird Strike
- Arkansas: Plane Crashes Near Clarksville Municipal Airport

FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

- Wisconsin: Razing I-794 Has Its Appeal. But Third Ward Business Operators Worry About Traffic Impact
- California: Repairs on Big Sur's Collapsed Highway 1 Start This Week. No Telling When They Will End
- Tennessee: Should Knoxville's \$42 Million Federal Grant Count as Atonement for Urban Renewal?
- Rhode Island: RIDOT Shifting Crossover Point on I-195 by the Washington Bridge
- Georgia: A Stitch and More - 3 Parks Have Been Suggested Above Atlanta Highways
- Maine: Republicans, DOT Chief Rip Democrats' Late Move to Divert Road and Bridge Funding

- California: Carlsbad Moving Forward with Plan to Realign Stretch of Highway 101
- Iowa: Cedar Rapids Lands \$56.4 Million Federal Grant to Fund New Eighth Avenue Arc of Justice Bridge
- Ohio: US Department of Transportation Awards Cincinnati Funding for Landslide Mitigation
- New York: South Grand Island Bridges to Receive Critical Upgrades
- North Carolina: North Carolina Could Get a New Interstate Highway. Here's Where

FEDERAL MOTOR CARRIER SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

- FMCSA Has Rejected 34% of Under-21 Truck Driver Applications
- Montana, Opinion: Self-Driving Semis... How Would They Handle Montana?
- Wisconsin Enacts Two New Laws Permitting Certain Heavier Truck Loads
- Kodiak Forms Autonomous Truck Council with Walmart, UPS

FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION

- Wall Street Journal, Editorial: Feather-Bedding on the Railroads
- Montana: Trial to Begin Against Buffett's Railroad Company Over Asbestos Deaths in Montana Town
- Louisiana: Will Gretna Finally Move the Railroad Out of Downtown? Here's Why It Could Happen.
- Indiana: Disabled Norfolk Southern Train Blocks Majority of Railroad Crossing in Mishawaka
- Pennsylvania: Changes Begin for Some Central Pennsylvania Amtrak Riders
- STB Denies Coalition to Stop CPKC Request
- Texas: Federal Law and State Common Law Preemption Questions at the Texas Supreme Court
- Alabama: Train Derailment Causes Road Closure in Shelby County
- North Dakota: East Grand Forks 'Quiet Zone' to Be Established by Next Spring
- Nevada, California: High-Speed Train Work Continuing Southwest of Las Vegas, I-15 Shoulders Set for Night Closures in California

FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION

- New York Times: Skip the Traffic - Commuters Turn to Ferries to Get Around
- District of Columbia: Police 'Real-Time Crime Center' Launches with Live Video Monitoring
- Pennsylvania: SEPTA's Drexel Station Reopens with Major Upgrades, Including Efforts to Connect It to Amtrak's 30th Street Station
- Washington Post, Opinion: Being 'Tough on Crime' Isn't an Appeal to White Voters
- California, Opinion: Orange County's Streetcar Struggles Serve as a Warning to

Surrounding Communities

- District of Columbia: Circulator Bus - What to Know About the Mayor's Shutdown Proposal
- Nevada: Las Vegas Monorail Isn't Closing, Counter to Social Media Rumors
- Rhode Island: RIPTA Bus Tunnel to Undergo \$15 Million Facelift
- Nevada: Reno Gets \$3.3 Million Boost from Federal Infrastructure Plan for Regional Bus System
- Wisconsin: Connect One BRT Fare-Free Rides Come to an End: What Riders Need to Know
- New York: Six Labor Organizations Break with LIRR's Largest Union, File for Federal Mediation
- Maryland: PACE Scholars Partner to Bring More Transportation to Salisbury
- Virginia: Work to Begin on Lewis Street Transit Hub Rehabilitation Project in Staunton
- Michigan: Public Transit Expands in Oakland County
- North Carolina: Changes Coming to GoRaleigh Bus Routes
- Rhode Island: RIPTA to Hold Public Hearings About Revised Proposed Service Changes

MARITIME ADMINISTRATION

- Red Sea: US Says It Destroyed Houthi Air Defense, Drone Systems in Red Sea Area
- California: How the Port of L.A. Transformed an Industrial Site into an Idyllic Waterfront Park
- Demand Shocks Keeping Aging Fleets Afloat, Argue Shipowners
- Haiti: Haitian Police Seize Hijacked Cargo Ship After 5-Hour Shootout
- California Unveils \$4.6B Transmission Plan for Offshore Wind

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- North Dakota: Public Hearings to Focus on Proposed 320-Mile Carbon Dioxide Pipeline

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- More in US Say They Wouldn't Consider Buying EV: Gallup
- New York Times, Opinion: Sometimes, to Make an Electric Car Better, You've Got to Make It a Little Worse
- Washington Post, Opinion: We Built 7 EV Chargers in 2 Years. That's Actually Not the Problem.
- Opinion: Finding a Path Forward for Mainstream Acceptance of EVs
- Ethanol Industry on EVs - The Infrastructure Isn't There and Consumers Aren't All in
- Biden Electric Vehicle Fuel Rule Draws Challenge From 13 States
- Opinion: EVs Amount to a Gov't Wealth Transfer You Pay for
- Pennsylvania: House Committee to Consider Bill Setting Electric Vehicle Fee to Start at \$125
- Illinois: Rivian Hosts R2 Open House in Normal, Its New Production Home
- North Carolina: Businesses Invited to Apply to NCDOT for Federal Funded EV Charger Proposals
- Arkansas: ArDOT Awards Nearly \$15M for New EV Charging Stations

Secretary in the News

Texas: Exclusive - Biden, Kishida Likely to Discuss Texas Bullet Train Project

Reuters (4/9, Kelly, Hunnicutt) reports in an exclusive that President Joe Biden is seeking to revive interest in a plan to build the first high-speed rail in the U. S. using Japanese bullet trains, with sources saying he is likely to discuss the project with Japan's prime minister in Washington this week. The leaders may publicly voice support for the multi-billion-dollar Texas project after Wednesday's talks, which have been partly overshadowed by U.S. opposition to another Japanese investment, Nippon Steel's planned purchase of U.S. Steel.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's state visit to Washington, the first by a Japanese leader in nine years, aims to showcase closer security and economic ties between the allies. The project linking Dallas and Houston will be on the agenda for the talks, said three sources familiar with summit preparations, who sought anonymity as they were not allowed to speak to the media. It is likely to be mentioned in joint statements following the talks, two of the sources said.

However, a senior Biden administration official said the project did not appear to have matured to the point where the leaders would announce progress publicly. All the sources cautioned that the details of the final agreements could change before the visit. Japan's foreign ministry declined to comment, saying the governments were still coordinating joint statements from the talks. The White House declined to comment.

Support from the leaders could unlock new cash from the Federal Railroad Administration and other Department of Transportation funds. But the project, estimated to cost between \$25 billion and \$30 billion, still faces potential hurdles in Texas and the U.S. Congress. Biden's Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg has voiced support for the plan. "We believe in this," he said in an interview with NBC 5 on Sunday. "Obviously it has to turn into a more specific design and vision but everything I've seen makes me very excited."

Ohio: US Department of Transportation Awards Cincinnati Funding for Landslide Mitigation

WLWT (4/8, Dietz) reports that the United States Department of Transportation has awarded the city of Cincinnati over \$10 million in federal funding for landslide mitigation efforts. Congressman Greg Landsman (OH-01) announced the grant on Monday. Landsman wrote to US Department of Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg last October in support of the city's application for the funding.

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DOT in the News

Maryland: Maryland Governor and Members of Congress to Meet to Discuss Support for Rebuilding Collapsed Bridge

AP (4/8, Witte) shares that Maryland Gov. Wes Moore said Monday he plans to meet with members of Congress to discuss support for rebuilding the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge, which has blocked the main shipping channel at Baltimore's port for nearly two weeks. "I'm going to be spending part of this week with our delegation going down and meeting with leaders and ranking members in the Congress and letting them know that this issue is not partisan. This is a patriotic responsibility to be able to support one of this country's great economic engines," Moore said in an interview with The Associated Press. "This is an opportunity to support a port that is directly responsible for the hiring of tens of thousands of people."

As Maryland lawmakers reached the end of their legislative session Monday, a measure authorizing use of the state's rainy day fund to help port employees was approved and sent to Moore's desk. The governor planned to sign the emergency legislation Tuesday, putting it into effect right away. WJZ (4/8, Davila) also reports.

Baltimore Sun (4/8, Jennemann) notes that nearly two weeks after a cargo ship struck the Francis Scott Key Bridge, causing it to collapse, one of the East Coast's busiest ports remains largely cut off from the seas. The reach of the Port of Baltimore is vast, and it could lose an estimated \$15 million per day while closed. In 2023, 19,970 port jobs were considered direct positions — or those that wouldn't exist without activities

by the port. Over 50,000 jobs altogether were attributed to the Port of Baltimore last year, according to the 2023 Economic Impact of the Port of Baltimore in Maryland report. Those include induced jobs such as positions at grocery stores patronized by port workers and indirect jobs such as repair technicians. The number of direct jobs in 2023 was a 32% increase from 2017. Baltimore County had the highest number of direct port workers, with nearly a third of workers residing there. Over 60% of the direct jobs were at public terminals.

A perspective for the Washington Post (4/8, Dvorak) writes that if you bought a new car in the past two decades, there's a chance Curnell Crockett drove it first. "You name it," said Crockett, 69. "If it comes off a ship, I drove it off." But right now, the longshoreman is worried about one truck: his black Chevy king cab and how he's going to keep making payments now that the docks are quiet. Crockett is one of thousands of dockworkers who are now idle because one of the last cargo ships they loaded two weeks ago demolished the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, choking the pathway to their livelihoods. About \$2 million a day in wages are at stake every day, Biden administration officials have said. "I was supposed to be on that one," said Sylvester Anderson, 62, who got a call to work on the cargo ship Dali that Monday but turned the job down. "Maybe I should've taken it." The longshore workers are a critical link in the American supply chain that's often forgotten. We see the ships loaded with containers, we dodge the trucks on freeways, and we greet the delivery drivers at our doorsteps, but every car, rubber duck, wrench and sundress that comes from overseas makes it onto U.S. soil thanks to the strong backs and steady hands of workers like Crockett and Anderson.

FreightWaves (4/8, Kingston) shares that as the days add up after the March 26 collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, companies that gather data from trucks and supply chains are beginning to get an idea of where trucks are rerouting in the catastrophe's wake. Data on ship rerouting is less conclusive. While some of that data is clear, a lot remains murky as shippers and carriers figure out how to loosen the logistical choke points the collapse created. One of the clearest data series in the market, because it is fed by decisions that need to be made that very day, is what routes trucks making their way through the Baltimore area are using instead of the Key Bridge, which crosses the eastern mouth of the Baltimore Inner Harbor where it meets Chesapeake Bay. Rishi Mehra, vice president of the Maps division of telematics company Trimble, has reviewed customer data on where trucks are rerouting away from the Key Bridge, which was on the eastern side of the Interstate 695 loop around Baltimore. So far, trucks are doing pretty much what everybody expected.

Mehra, in an interview with FreightWaves, said the largest diversion has seen traffic increase in the Fort McHenry Tunnel on Interstate 95 that travels under the more northern part of the Port of Baltimore. Behind that for diversions is the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel, whose route is slightly south of the Fort McHenry Tunnel but is only two lanes. Mehra said that is likely a reason why it has seen a lesser increase in truck traffic. Truckers might see the two-lane approach with walls on both sides as tight, he added. "What we are looking for is to see increased traffic coming out of the other ports," Mehra said. That data would be able to show how many power units have been shifted out of Baltimore and to what areas. Trimble data has not spotted any significant pickup in other routing that might be increasing in frequency as a result of the closure. "There's nothing out of the ordinary right now," Mehra said. The diversions being recorded by Trimble are for trucks that aren't pulling hazardous materials. Trucks with

hazmat loads are rerouted all the way to the western side of Baltimore on I-695.

gCaptain (4/8, Schuler) adds that the collapse has not led to an increase in ocean freight container shipping rates, according to ocean freight rate benchmarking firm Xeneta. Xeneta's data shows that, contrary to expectations, the average spot rates from the Far East to the US North East Coast, including Baltimore, have actually experienced a slight decrease of 1% since the bridge collapse on March 26. The current rate stands at USD 5421 per FEU (40ft shipping container). This trend holds for other US East Coast ports such as New York / New Jersey, with rates from the Far East having decreased by 3% during the same period. The dip in shipping rates is even more pronounced from North Europe to the US North East Coast, with an 8% decrease, and a 4% decrease when including other US East Coast ports. "Spot rates have not reacted but that doesn't mean shippers with cargo heading to Baltimore are not affected – on the contrary they are seeing containers arriving at ports they were not expecting," said Peter Sand, Xeneta Chief Analyst. Sand explains that rates are likely not increasing because the majority of diverted containers are being handled at New York and New Jersey, where many of the ships originally bound for Baltimore would have been stopping anyway. AJOT (4/8) also reports on the Xeneta data.

New York Times (4/8, Yan) notes that workers on Sunday began removing containers from the giant cargo vessel that remains pinned under the metal remains of Baltimore's Key Bridge, nearly two weeks after the ship struck the bridge and caused it to collapse. The Hill (4/8), USA Today (4/8), and CBS News (4/8) also report on the Sunday statement and development.

Meanwhile, Baltimore Banner (4/8, Boteler) reports that officials also referenced "recent incursions" by drones into the safety zone around the site of the crash. Six drone operators have violated the flight restrictions around the bridge, according to the Federal Aviation Administration. The FAA confirmed it was investigating but said it does not discuss open cases. The Unified Command maintains a 2000-yard maritime safety zone for recovery efforts and the temporary flight restriction is a no fly-zone with a radius of three nautical miles from the surface, up to and including 1,500 feet above ground level. Those restrictions also apply to drones, not just manned aircraft.

What Will We Learn From the Key Bridge Collapse? Engineers Ponder Safety Lessons

Baltimore Banner (4/8, Conarck) notes that it's a familiar pattern for engineering experts. After a major disaster, the National Transportation Safety Board launches an investigation. Conclusions are drawn. Lessons are learned. Often, new regulations and safety protocols follow. But the Key Bridge collapse, unique in many ways, poses a particular set of questions that could span multiple federal agencies.

"The Baltimore bridge lies in a special category," said John Stanton, a professor of civil engineering at the University of Washington. The Key Bridge spanned a large shipping channel, which made it susceptible to ship impacts and gave it "a particular niche along the curve of probability vs. consequence," Stanton said. "We would like to think of it as a low-probability-but-high-consequence event," Stanton said. "Unfortunately, it was the second but not the first." In seeking to better understand the collapse, conversations with nearly a dozen engineering experts have identified scores of potential changes that might follow the Key Bridge disaster. They include federally mandated reinforcement of support piers for bridges in shipping lanes, stricter rules for

ships that pass beneath critical infrastructure on their way to or from port, enhanced requirements for tugboats to escort large ships, and relatively uncommon solutions such as bridge “collision detection systems.”

Gongkang Fu, a professor of civil engineering at the Illinois Institute of Technology, said that container ships have increased in volume significantly since the Key Bridge was designed. “What has changed for bridge design since then? Not that much,” Fu said. “So right there, apparently there’s a gap somewhere.” Bridge design goes by specifications, last updated in 2007, Fu said, and there’s no expectation for a bridge to be stronger than what those specifications require. But Fu also questioned whether it would be feasible to design a bridge to withstand the type of collision, a moving object striking a stationary object, that occurred between the Dali and the Key Bridge, given how costly such fortification would likely be. He said the onus should primarily be on updating rules and regulations for ships. “That doesn’t mean that we shy away from our responsibilities as bridge engineers,” Fu said. “We can improve, but I don’t think it’s going to be feasible to prevent that kind of thing from happening.” The goal should be to design bridges that do not entirely collapse in the event of a ship strike, Fu said, similar to the way structures are designed to resist earthquakes.

Stanton agreed that financial constraints will likely be a primary factor when it comes to devising better methods to protect bridges from ships. Physical barriers, such as concrete dolphins, are expensive, but Stanton said they likely protect against a standard human error by a ship operator or tugboat captain. “Perhaps we should devise a system whereby the ships ... that have the potential for the greatest damage need a more secure approach,” Stanton said. “Maybe they have to post a [returnable] bond before ever coming into the harbor.” Some experts have pointed to relatively novel “ship collision detection systems” as an inexpensive improvement that could potentially save lives. Last week, during a Johns Hopkins University panel of experts webinar on the Key Bridge collapse, Susu Xu, an assistant professor in the department of civil and systems engineering, said bridges in shipping channels should be retrofitted with sensors on their decks.

Meanwhile, Capital Gazette (4/8, Parker) reports that Maryland civil rights leaders have begun to mobilize around the idea of changing the names of two bridges in the state, including the recently collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge. Two resolutions calling for the name changes were introduced at Monday’s meeting of the Caucus of African American Leaders, a statewide consortium that includes local NAACP branches and the United Black Clergy of Maryland. In addition to the Key Bridge, which fell into the Patapsco River last month after a cargo carrier collided with one of its supports, the caucus is seeking to rename the Frederick C. Malkus Bridge, which extends across the Choptank River to and from Cambridge in Dorchester County. Citing racist behavior and beliefs by both men, the resolutions passed unanimously and seek to rename the Key and Malkus bridges after two people who “made greater contributions to the betterment of Maryland.” The Key Bridge would be named for Congressman Parren J. Mitchell, the first Black Marylander elected to Congress. The Malkus Bridge would be named after civil rights leader Gloria Richardson, whose nonviolent protests combatted segregation on the Eastern Shore. Caucus convener Carl Snowden said the resolutions were hand-delivered to Gov. Wes Moore’s office soon after the meeting. Baltimore Banner (4/8) and WMDT (4/8) also report on the proposal.

Congress’ Spring Agenda: LNG, Baltimore Bridge, Permitting

E&E News (4/8, Picon, Brugger, Heller) reports that Congress returns to Capitol Hill this week having recently wrapped up a turbulent fiscal 2024 appropriations process but still staring down a host of pressing priorities — including on major energy issues. The two-week recess saw a spate of developments that added new urgency to issues that had previously taken a back seat to the spending negotiations, requiring timely action that will fill the House and Senate schedules for the coming days and weeks. The House is back Tuesday and the Senate Monday. “When we return, we have a busy agenda facing us,” Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said in a letter to colleagues Friday. “I have said repeatedly this Congress, with divided government, bipartisanship and compromise are the only ways to make progress and get things done that will help the American people,” he added.

The March 26 collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore will be among the first tests of Congress’ ability to pass urgent bipartisan legislation. Lawmakers will need to approve an emergency spending package to fund a rebuild of the critical thoroughfare following President Joe Biden’s calls for the federal government to fully fund the recovery. The recess also saw the continuation of debates around the Biden administration’s temporary pause on liquefied natural gas (LNG) export approvals. House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.), hoping to bolster conservative support for a long-stalled foreign aid package, recently floated the idea of linking that aid to a plan to overturn the LNG pause. Such a proposal, however, could ultimately complicate passage further. Meanwhile, negotiations around reforming the permitting process for energy projects are expected to continue. And Republicans are charting a path for rolling back the Biden administration’s recently finalized rules on vehicle emissions.

Texas: A Gates-Backed Startup Is Making Fuel from Water and Carbon Dioxide

Bloomberg (4/8, Liu) reports that the economy of Corpus Christi, Texas, is largely built on fossil fuels. A stone’s throw away from major oil and gas fields, the port city is home to dozens of fossil fuel companies. It exports more crude oil every year than any other city in the US. But Corpus Christi’s future fortunes, at least in the eyes of one startup, will be made off a fuel derived from carbon dioxide. If it can be scaled, that fuel could play a vital role in cleaning up the hardest-to-decarbonize portions of the transportation industry from aviation to heavy-duty trucking. Since its Corpus Christi facility came online in October, Sacramento, California-based Infinium has become one of the first e-fuel makers in the world to turn industrial-scale production from a concept into a reality. At its plant, electrolyzers break down water into hydrogen and oxygen, using electricity generated from nearby wind and solar farms. The hydrogen is then transported to a reactor, where it meets CO₂ captured from local refineries, setting off a series of complex chemical reactions aided by patented catalysts. The result is a synthetic fuel with the same chemical properties as its fossil fuel-based cousins. On any given day, Infinium produces nearly 8,300 liters of what’s known in the industry as electrofuel or e-fuel and distributes it to customers across the US. A slogan on the company’s trucks reads: “Clean fuels made from renewable energy and carbon dioxide.”

Hydrocarbons — compounds of hydrogen and carbon atoms — are the basis of crude oil that is turned into fuels to power everything from trucks to jets. But those atoms can be combined in an industrial setting and made into a substitute fuel that can have lower planet-warming impacts. Aviation is responsible for more than 2% of the world’s

greenhouse gas emissions. Freight transportation — done largely by truck, ship and rail — contributes another 8%. Both figures are expected to balloon in the coming decades as demand for travel and shipping increases while easily decarbonized sectors of the economy cut their emissions. Regulations such as the EU's increased scrutiny of heavy-duty vehicles and its sustainable aviation fuel mandate are putting pressure on these industries to clean up their pollution. With demand soaring, there's a growing push to fast-track solutions, including but not limited to e-fuels. Practically nonexistent five years ago, the e-fuel market will reach nearly \$50 billion by 2030, according to some industry estimates.

Using electrolysis to make hydrogen-based products — the backbone technology for e-fuel — is not new. Factories deployed the technique to produce ammonia as early as the 1920s. Most of those plants were decommissioned in the following years as a cheaper alternative (converting natural gas and coal into ammonia) lured away customers. That alternative, though, is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, while electrolysis done using clean energy is carbon-free. The tide may be turning again as a growing number of companies, ranging from airlines to freight truck operators, rethink their climate toll. While commercial production of e-fuel is still in its infancy, "it's getting a lot of interest," says Rose Oates, an analyst with research firm BloombergNEF. E-fuel can be a "dominant player" in decarbonizing transportation, says Robert Schuetzle, founder and chief executive officer of Infinium. The three-year-old startup has 13 more projects under development in Texas and elsewhere.

New York: Container Ship's Engines Die Outside NYC, Comes to Stop Near Verrazzano Bridge

Fox News (4/8, Ruiz) reports that a large container ship lost propulsion in waters near New York Harbor Friday evening before tugboats pulled it to a stop at an anchorage near the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge. The scene evoked last month's tragedy in Baltimore Harbor when another container vessel slammed into the Francis Scott Key Bridge, knocking it down and killing a half-dozen people who were conducting maintenance work. Police managed to close the bridge to traffic before the impact there. The 89,000-ton vessel, the APL Qingdao, lost power in the Kill Van Kull waterway, a busy shipping lane between the Big Apple's borough of Staten Island and New Jersey. A group of tugboats pulled the stalled vessel out of the way, placing it near the bridge to anchor safely while repairs could be made, the U.S. Coast Guard told Fox News Digital in a statement. "The vessel regained propulsion and was assisted to safely anchor in Stapleton Anchorage, outside the navigable channel just north of the Verrazzano Bridge, by three towing vessels," the Coast Guard said.

WCBS (4/8, Saeidi) reports that maritime experts said that incidents like that are not uncommon. Lawrence Brennan is a retired U.S. Navy captain from Staten Island and he says he knows the waters well. "Rapid and successful response by the ship's crew and the pilot on board, and the assisting tugs came up a mile or two from stern, where they had left the ship when they were being the Staten Island Ferry Terminal," Brennan said. Vessels can lose steering, propulsion, or power. Brennan said a loss of propulsion is not uncommon, adding in New York Harbor there are layers of protection. Tugs assist ships to and from the pier, helping them navigate in confined waters. Brennan also pointed to the Vessel Traffic Service -- or VTS system in New York. It's like air traffic control for the water. "The New York VTS system is probably one of the more complicated and larger ones," Brennan said. "Baltimore is a different size, different

type of harbor, and it doesn't seem to have quite as, and I don't want to say good, but as sophisticated a system as we have in New York." USA Today (4/8, Crowley), The Today Show (4/8), NewsNation (4/8, Delandro) and Maritime Executive (4/8) provide additional coverage.

New York: Most NYC Infrastructure Projects Are Delayed and Over Budget, State Comptroller Says

Gothamist (4/8, Kriegstein, Giambrone) reports that the state comptroller is calling for improvements to New York City's infrastructure planning and development after his office found most projects were delayed or over budget. Initial project budgets and schedules were consistently blown for more than 5,100 projects studied, according to a new report by New York state Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli's office. But a key city agency said the analysis is flawed because it counts routine maintenance projects being done "in house" as major capital projects with specific start and end dates. Nearly two-thirds of the projects examined were delayed more than three months past their planned completion dates; just under half were "excessively delayed" more than three years past those dates; and just over half exceeded their initial budgets, to the tune of \$54.5 billion in total cost overruns. Nearly two-fifths of the projects were at least 20% over budget, the report found. "Given limited resources and an escalating cost environment, the city should monitor its capital spending in a more uniform and comprehensive manner so it can review funding expectations, prioritize where additional work is needed, and maximize the return on every capital dollar it spends," DiNapoli said in a statement on Friday.

New York, Editorial: A Missing Vote on the MTA Board: Rockland County's Voice Is Silenced on Congestion Pricing

An editorial from New York Daily News (4/8) argues that Rockland County Executive Ed Day isn't alone in opposing the MTA's congestion pricing plan to charge a \$15 fee to bring a private vehicle below 60th St. and he isn't alone in bringing a lawsuit (his, filed two weeks ago, is the sixth federal case so brought). What is different among all the plaintiffs, (all of whom don't want to pay) is that Day gets to name a board member to the MTA who could have spoken out and voted against the program, which was passed by the panel, 11-1, a day after he sued. The problem is that the Rockland's MTA seat, representing Day and the more than 300,000 people of Rockland, has been vacant since last June and Gov. Hochul is at fault for keeping it vacant. We note that if even Rockland voted no it wouldn't have changed the tally, as Rockland "shares" a vote with Dutchess and Putnam and Orange counties and since Dutchess and Putnam were supporting congestion pricing and the Orange seat is also vacant, it still would have been 11-1. But Rockland has a legal right to have a board member and for that member to speak on behalf of the county, which was denied.

The previous Rockland member of the MTA board, Frank Borelli, resigned on June 1, 2023. Following the law, Day sent to Hochul's appointment office the required three names for her to pick one. Day indicated his preferred nominee along with two alternates. The governor then submits a nomination to the state Senate for confirmation. The Senate has three committees review the nomination followed by a floor vote. That is what happened with five MTA confirmations on March 20, a week before the MTA vote on congestion pricing. But Hochul never picked a nominee from Rockland. For months since last June, Day's office kept checking with Hochul's people

to see if anything else was needed and was told that it was not. But there was no action. Then, on March 11, the governor's office contacted Day because one of the alternates had died on Jan. 23 and so a new name was needed. Day then provided the name of a new alternate on March 26.

Hochul had six months to pick one of the three names provided by Day and didn't do so. And even after the alternate died (which Day was not aware of), the governor still could have selected one of the other two or at least then not waited weeks to request a replacement name. Whatever the excuse, Rockland went without a vote and a voice on congestion pricing. We support congestion pricing and are happy it passed and while we oppose Day's lawsuit, he should have had his pick on the MTA Board. It still would have been adopted, but perhaps it would have been modified. And at the least the Rockland member would have been on the record. The other vacant seat, for Orange County, has been empty since last March and County Executive Steve Neuhaus has not submitted any names to Hochul, so that's on Neuhaus. As we've complained before, nominations to state posts must be listed on a website, like the feds and New Jersey use. These are public positions and the public has a right to know what is happening, or is not happening.

Oklahoma: Oklahoma Lawmakers Want More Oversight for Infrastructure Development Funds

The Center Square (4/8, Jarrett) reports that the Oklahoma Senate Business and Commerce Committee is proposing more oversight on money spent for infrastructure development. The committee advanced House Bill 3622 on Monday, which would create the Oklahoma Enterprise Task Force. "This is very similarly modeled to the governor's Workforce Development Council," said Sen. Adam Pugh, R-Edmond, the Senate sponsor of the bill. "However, as this body's been a part of putting a tremendous amount of effort into developing the workforce, we've put dollars into developing the sites and the infrastructures but there's been no oversight mechanism with those dollars so this task force creates kind of the oversight mechanism of that infrastructure buildout." The bill has no direct fiscal or revenue considerations, according to House fiscal staff.

The task force would be comprised of 25 members and would be required to hold an organizational day no later than 60 days after the measure takes effect. The Secretary of Workforce and Economic Development would serve as chair and the Director of the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission would serve as vice-chair, according to the bill. Other members would include the Executive Director of the Oklahoma Department of Transportation and the Executive Director of the Oklahoma Department of Commerce. "It lays out the membership but then it divides the state into quadrants based on where 535 and 540 intersect and ensures that each one of those regions is being considered as infrastructure dollars are invested and sites are developed," Pugh said. Members of the task force would be tasked with gathering and analyzing information to make recommendations on best practice methods to support infrastructure development in Oklahoma, according to the bill. The focus would be ensuring the ability to support a minimum of four sites in addition to any existing sites in the state that support for-profit business enterprises, the bill says.

Newest Members of National Transportation Safety Board Sworn In

WJLA (4/8, Minock) reports that on Monday in Washington D.C., the National

Transportation Safety Board's (NTSB) newest members were sworn in. "Over 41,000 people lose their lives on highway accidents every year. We need to learn from every one of those tragedies. And we will," said Todd Inman. Inman gave the oath of office which was administered by former U.S. Secretary of Transportation and former U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao. Inman previously served as Chao's Director of Operations and Chief of Staff at the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT).

NTSB Chair Jennifer Homendy welcomed Inman, who is joining the transportation safety watchdog agency as the board is investigating the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse in Baltimore and other major transportation incidents. Alvin Brown was also sworn in as a member of the NTSB. Brown comes from the U.S. Department of Transportation, where he served as senior adviser for community infrastructure opportunities. From 2011 to 2015, he was mayor of Jacksonville, Florida.

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Federal Aviation Administration

Reuters: Airlines Struggle With Lack of Planes as Summer Travel Set to Hit Record Levels

Reuters (4/9, Singh) reports that the global airline industry is facing a summer squeeze, with travel demand expected to surpass pre-pandemic levels while aircraft deliveries drop sharply due to production problems at Boeing and Airbus. Air carriers are spending billions on repairs to keep flying older, less fuel-efficient jets, and paying a premium to secure aircraft from lessors. But some carriers are still being forced to trim their schedules to cope with the lack of available planes. At the same time, the number of travelers globally is set to hit historic levels, with 4.7 billion people expected to travel in 2024 compared with 4.5 billion in 2019.

Passenger carriers will receive 19% fewer aircraft this year than they expected because of production issues at Boeing and Airbus, said Martha Neubauer, senior associate at AeroDynamic Advisory. U.S. carriers will receive 32% fewer aircraft than planned a year ago because several airlines depend on Boeing's 737 MAX planes, Neubauer said.

Analysts expect capacity at most U.S. carriers in the second quarter to grow at a slower pace than a year ago. Airlines will update their growth plans and explain how they will offset capacity constraints when they report quarterly results, starting on Wednesday with Delta Air Lines.

Due to the shortage of new planes, the aircraft leasing market is booming. Data from Cirium Ascend Consultancy shows that lease rates for new Airbus A320-200neo and Boeing 737-8 MAX aircraft have hit \$400,000 per month, the highest since mid-2008. Airlines are spending 30% more on aircraft leases than before the pandemic, said John Heimlich, chief economist at Airlines for America (A4A) that represents major U.S. carriers.

They are also holding on to jets that are past their useful economic lives and require heavy maintenance that now takes several months, Heimlich said. Repair costs at United, Delta, and American were up 40% last year from 2019.

FAA's 'Cozy' Relationship with Boeing at Issue Again After Alaska Air Blowout

Seattle Times (4/8, Malone) reports that following the crashes of two 737 MAX jets that left more than 300 people dead and Boeing's reputation for safety in tatters, Congress held probing hearings that unmasked limp and malleable federal oversight of how American planes are built. While the flying public enjoyed the safest decade on record until the crashes five years ago, Boeing capitalized by persistently convincing the Federal Aviation Administration to narrow its scrutiny of the company's factory floor, former employees of the company and its chief regulator told The Seattle Times. With each passing year, the FAA ceded a little more of its authority by deputizing manufacturers like Boeing to police the quality of their own work. Congress held hearings in 2020 investigating the twinned tragedies in Ethiopia and Indonesia, crashes caused primarily by engineering mistakes at Boeing. The panel reached the conclusion that Boeing — not the FAA — was comfortably piloting its own regulatory fate, and demanded a course correction.

Internal communications between Boeing and the FAA, testimony from experts who'd seen Boeing's manipulation of the FAA, and surveys of FAA employees uncovered during that 2020 inquiry showed technical design flaws and faulty assumptions about pilot responses, as well as management failures by both Boeing and the FAA, were instrumental in the chain of errors that led to the crashes. Years have passed since his committee issued that report, but former U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio says the government still hasn't solved its Boeing problem. "You've got to turn this company around because it's a mess," the Oregon Democrat said recently. "The worst part of the equation is Boeing, but it will take political pushing because there's so much inertia there."

DeFazio's hearings resulted in a new law — the Aircraft Certification, Safety, and Accountability Act — and FAA promises to strictly monitor the quality of Boeing aircraft. But critics of the FAA now say the slow action on those legislated changes and promises have meant alarmingly little. "Since ACSAA became law, Boeing has supported implementation of the legislation, including providing full transparency for the FAA's expert review panel in its evaluation of our safety culture and other safety measures," Boeing said in a statement responding to questions from The Times. "Over the past several years, we've taken a number of significant actions to strengthen our safety practices and culture. We put safety and quality above all else, and continue to make significant changes to our culture, production and processes as we strive to improve."

Spirit Airlines Will Delay Plane Purchases and Furlough Pilots

AP (4/8) reports that Spirit Airlines is deferring all aircraft on order from Airbus that were scheduled to be delivered in the second quarter of 2025 through the end of 2026, the discount carrier said Monday. Spirit said it came to an agreement with the European plane manufacturer to delay delivery of the planes until 2030 and 2031. "Deferring these aircraft gives us the opportunity to reset the business and focus on the core airline while we adjust to changes in the competitive environment," said Spirit President and Chief Executive Ted Christie. "In addition, enhancing our liquidity provides us additional financial stability as we position the company for a return to profitability." Spirit said the deferrals will bolster Spirit's liquidity by about \$340 million over the next two years. Florida-based Spirit also said it plans

to furlough 260 pilots effective Sept. 1 as a result of the deferrals and ongoing problems with the availability of Pratt & Whitney GTF engines. Pratt & Whitney recently agreed to compensate Spirit, which grounded 13 of the planes in question in January with the expectation that number would rise. Spirit estimated the compensation agreement with Pratt & Whitney would improve its liquidity by between \$150 million and \$200 million. New York Times (4/8, Chokshi), Reuters (4/8, Sophia), Bloomberg (4/8, Philip, Schlangenstein), CNBC (4/8, Josephs), Fox Business (4/8, Genovese) and Skift (4/8, Smith) provide additional coverage.

Financial Risks Abound as Boeing Tries to Stabilize Itself

Wall Street Journal (4/8, Maurer) reports that Boeing is on track to stabilize its finances, but new leadership, a potential major acquisition, labor negotiations and tougher regulatory oversight over its quality controls and production could add uncertainty to its efforts. The aircraft manufacturer expects a cash hit of between \$4 billion and \$4.5 billion for the first quarter as a result of a production slowdown following a midair accident on an Alaska Airlines flight in January, Chief Financial Officer Brian West said at a conference last month. That won't prevent the company from reaching its annual free-cash-flow target of about \$10 billion sometime in the coming years, he said, a goal that coincides with continued efforts to pay down its debt load. Boeing has been working to recover from the reputational and financial fallout over two plane crashes in 2018 and 2019 involving the 737 MAX jet, along with troubles during the pandemic as air travel plummeted. The company hasn't paid a dividend since March 2020 or bought back shares since 2019. For West, the CFO since 2021, that recovery is bringing continuing challenges. Boeing on March 25 said Chief Executive David Calhoun would step down at the end of the year, although he is expected to exit as soon as it names a successor. The company faces an expiring labor union contract in September, a proposed multibillion-dollar acquisition of troubled supplier Spirit AeroSystems and growing regulatory scrutiny amid ongoing efforts to increase cash flow and reduce its debt. Boeing hasn't booked an annual profit since 2018. The company's net loss narrowed in 2023, to \$2.24 billion from \$5.05 billion the previous year.

Boeing's 777 'Gliders' Signal More Cash Woes

Bloomberg (4/8, Johnsson) reports that Boeing Co. likely didn't deliver any 777 freighters during the first quarter, adding to its cash woes at a time when 737 Max handovers are sluggish amid heightened government scrutiny. The planemaker as of last week had 11 newly built "gliders" — an industry term for finished aircraft that are lacking engines — stashed in and around its factory in Everett, Washington, Jefferies analyst Sheila Kahyaoglu said in an April 5 report citing data from Aero Analysis Partners/AIR. The cash-flow drag from 11 newly built but undelivered 777 freighters would translate to roughly \$1.16 billion, according to George Ferguson, analyst with Bloomberg Intelligence. He estimates each aircraft not delivered represents a cash outflow of about \$105 million. The bottleneck highlights how Boeing's manufacturing challenges extend beyond its cash-cow 737 Max jet. The aerospace giant is working to bring its factories and supply chain back to a steady cadence under scrutiny from US regulators following a series of quality lapses.

Eclipse Flights Swarm Airports: 'We Had to Close the Runway to

Park Planes'

CNBC (4/8, Josephs) reports that the Federal Aviation Administration reported ground stops that halted arrivals into some small U.S. airports from Burlington, Vermont, to southern Illinois. Airlines have added flights that would offer passengers a chance to see the solar eclipse from the air. Southern Illinois Airport in Murphysboro, Illinois, had to shut one of its runways to accommodate demand.

California: S.F. Says It Will Sue If Oakland Airport Goes Through with Planned Name Change

San Francisco Chronicle (4/8, Cano) reports that San Francisco and Oakland's escalating fight over the potential renaming of the East Bay's international airport could reach the courtroom. San Francisco on Monday said it will sue the Port of Oakland for alleged trademark infringement if it moves forward with plans to rename Oakland's airport as the San Francisco Bay Oakland International Airport. The Port of Oakland, in response, said it's justified in pursuing the name change and would "defend its right to use this accurate geographic identifier." The threat of legal action comes days before the Board of Port Commissioners are expected to vote on approving the name change for what's currently known as Metropolitan Oakland International Airport, with the airport code OAK. It's also the latest escalation in San Francisco officials' miffed response to the idea that the East Bay airport and San Francisco International Airport could share similar names. Oakland leaders in late March unveiled a proposal to attach "San Francisco Bay" to OAK airport in a push to boost passenger traffic. The name change, they said, would help increase awareness from outside travelers by associating the airport with the broader region. The new name, if approved, wouldn't change the airport's code or visual branding, according to the Port of Oakland. Port officials pointed to focus group research showing that 51% of international travelers didn't know that the Oakland airport was in the Bay Area. The potential for more travelers, Oakland officials say, could lure airline companies to expand operations at the East Bay airport and aid its post-pandemic recovery. But the proposal has attracted intense pushback from city officials across the bay. San Francisco Examiner (4/8, Salazar), San Francisco Standard (4/8, Gaus), The Oaklandside (4/8, Wolfe), KTVU (4/8, Fernandez) and KPIX (4/8, Fang) provide additional coverage.

Unions Irked as US's Frontier Eyes Business Model Revamp

CH Aviation (4/8, Garbuno) reports that Frontier Airlines will focus its growth on "high fare" markets such as Seattle Tacoma International, Detroit Metropolitan and Indianapolis International, while reducing its footprint in leisure markets such as Las Vegas Harry Reid and Orlando International, the company's chief executive Barry Biffle has told Reuters. The US leisure-focused ultra-low-cost carrier will try to boost revenue by taking advantage of the growing demand for premium travel, adding more seats with extra legroom and business fares. It also aims to reduce capacity at Vegas and Orlando by 33% this summer season while raising it at airports where it faces less competition from other budget carriers. Frontier has failed to post a profit in three of the last four quarters, reporting a USD11 million net loss for 2023. Unions are not happy with the changes, however. The Association of Flight Attendants (AFA) told Frontier in a letter seen by CH-Aviation that it had filed notice of a dispute under the Railway Labor Act, which regulates labor relations in the airline industry, due to the

“management’s plans for an overhaul of the airline’s business model.” “Frontier Airlines’ management has announced it intends to shift to an entirely new business model,” it said. “This wholesale change in the business model would drastically impact the compensation, out-of-pocket costs, and working lives of flight attendants.” The AFA urged Biffle and the carrier’s management to resolve these issues through direct negotiations and copied in the National Mediation Board in the letter, although it hoped this assistance would not be necessary.

FAA Reviewing Ways to Remove Barriers Preventing Pilots from Seeking Mental Health Support

KIRO (4/8, Garriss) reports that John Hauser was an aspiring pilot who loved flying, but his parents said they didn’t realize he was suffering in silence until he took his own life by crashing his plane in 2021. Last year at a mental health in aviation summit, his mother, Anne Suh, shared a message John wrote before his death. “Get the FAA to change the rules on pilots seeking help with their mental health. I know it would change a lot of things for the better and would help a lot of people out, love you John,” said Anne Suh in December of 2023. Since then, the Federal Aviation Administration appointed an expert panel to help address the barriers preventing pilots and air traffic controllers from seeking help. Many of them been afraid to come forward in fear of losing their jobs. Now the panel has released 24 recommendations. One of the key findings – the FAA should create a way for them to disclose conditions and treatments, without punishment. “It puts away the fear that they have that, that they’re going to lose certification for them to be able to work,” said Suh. But pilot Frank DePiano believes it may be difficult to find the right balance. “Take an extreme case, I have a fantasy about going up in flames. Well, you know, the FAA certainly would be irresponsible not to take that person, at least temporarily out of the cockpit,” said DePiano. “So, it becomes punitive, without a meaning to be punitive. It’s meant to protect a greater part of society and sacrifice, maybe this one person’s livelihood, career, whatever it might be, to protect what might be hundreds or even more people, keep them safe,” he said. Other recommendations include allowing pilots and air traffic controllers to go to talk therapy without disclosing it, developing peer support programs, and reconsidering FAA’s policies about using anxiety medications.

Flying Cars Aren’t Yet Cleared for Takeoff, but Change Is on the Horizon

A column in Seattle Times (4/8, Elliott) notes that if you’d told me a few weeks ago that flying cars will change the way we travel, I probably would have laughed at you. But when Elon Musk hinted there might be a flying Tesla soon, the internet started buzzing with flying car news. And now people are talking. “There’s absolutely a sense that the time has come,” says aviation industry investment banker Joey Smith at Cassel Salpeter & Co. “Numerous well-funded companies are racing to build a viable production vehicle, and they could take to the skies as early as next year.” What’s more, attitudes toward advanced air mobility — that’s a fancy term for flying cars and other personal flying vehicles — have shifted. A new study suggests Americans, and particularly younger urban consumers, are warming to the idea of flying to their next destination. Even so, the definition of a flying car is a little hard to pin down. I’ll explain in a minute. Don’t expect to open your apartment window and see a scene

out of a sci-fi movie like “Minority Report” anytime soon. (You know, lanes of flying vehicles lining the sky.) It’ll be a slow rollout, but it has the potential to change the way we travel like we haven’t seen since the introduction of the jet engine.

Office of Space Commerce Calls for International Cooperation in Space Situational Awareness

SpaceNews (4/8, Werner) reports that the U.S. Office of Space Commerce is eager to work with other nations to establish a global, coordinated space situational awareness (SSA) system. As the Office of Space Commerce takes over responsibility for sharing civil and commercial SSA from the U.S. Department of Defense, it’s clear “the U.S. alone can’t solve these problems,” Richard DalBello, Office of Space Commerce director, said at the 39th Space Symposium here. “These problems are bigger than our borders because we are all operating in international space.” In the future, the office envisions “a global, coordinated system of SSA providers, with a series of regional hubs providing SSA information and services to spacecraft operators,” according to Global Space Situational Awareness Coordination, a document distributed at the Symposium. “These centers will be supported by networks of international partnerships, and their services will be augmented by a robust global commercial SSA sector.” An internationally coordinated system “will be necessary to minimize the potential for spacecraft operators to receive conflicting information about potential conjunction events,” the document said. Coordination also lays the foundation for future space traffic coordination “efforts, which require that spacecraft operators have consistent information on the likelihood and nature of potential conjunctions, allowing for a safe and efficient adjudication of the issue.”

Florida: Orlando International Airport Scores \$61.9 Million Federal Grant

Orlando Business Journal (4/8, Lynch) reports that Orlando International Airport has been awarded more federal funds tied to its Terminal C. The airport on April 5 won \$61.94 million from the Federal Aviation Administration to expand Terminal C’s apron by 138,481 square yards. The apron is where airplanes can receive fuel and is where passengers enter and exit the plane. The Orlando project received much of the latest round of \$148.3 million in airport infrastructure grants, which were given to 73 projects in 28 states and Guam. U.S. Rep. Darren Soto — a Democrat whose district includes the airport — said in a prepared statement that the airport now has gotten more than \$200 million in federal funds, which includes money for four new gates, a 450-foot pedestrian bridge and upgrades to runways. “Terminal C now features state-of-the-art technology to cater to an extra 10-12 million passengers annually.” The Terminal C apron improvements will help the airport’s efficiency, said Kevin Thibault, CEO of the Greater Orlando Aviation Authority, in a prepared statement. Airport executives were not immediately available for comment on the apron project’s construction timeline. The enclosed pedestrian bridge and rental car area are expected to be completed by this fall, and the new gates should be completed by 2026. In the airport’s long-term plan, it will add 16 to 24 gates to the Terminal C building, though it likely will be a while before the airport starts construction on those. WOFL (4/8, Medina) and Spectrum News (4/8) provide additional coverage.

United Airlines Delays Two New Routes Amid FAA Safety Review

Bloomberg (4/8, Schlangenstein) reports that United Airlines Holdings Inc. is delaying two new routes due to growth restrictions imposed while US aviation authorities carry out a safety review of the carrier. A route between Newark, New Jersey, and Faro, Portugal, that was set to begin May 24 will be put off until summer 2025, United said Monday via email. A separate route between Tokyo and Cebu, Philippines, has been moved from July 31 to Oct. 27. The changes show how the airline's expansion is slowing amid the Federal Aviation Administration's review, which was prompted by a series of headline-grabbing incidents in recent weeks, including an aircraft running off a Houston runway and a wheel falling off another plane just after takeoff. The domestic industry has been under heightened scrutiny since a fuselage panel broke loose during an Alaska Airlines flight Jan. 5. Bloomberg reported last month that regulators were weighing a clampdown on United's ability to grow, including restricting new routes and barring it from flying paying customers on newly delivered aircraft. The FAA subsequently said it would increase oversight, delaying some United activities. The carrier is conducting its own internal review. A United spokesperson confirmed that the schedule changes are related to the FAA review, which affected some certification activities. Customers impacted by the delays can seek full refunds or be rebooked on a partner airline without a fee, the carrier said.

Florida: St. Augustine's Northeast Florida Regional Airport (NFRA) Welcomes Banyan Air Service

St. Augustine Record (4/8, Viti) reports that St. Augustine's Northeast Florida Regional Airport (NFRA) welcomes Banyan Air Service, a maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) provider for HondaJets. Headquartered in Fort Lauderdale, Banyan's first hangar facility expansion in America's oldest city will host four Honda factory-trained technicians. The goal is to make additional hires to, as they say, serve the burgeoning aviation needs of the southeastern United States. "Specializing in HondaJet sales and service, the decision to lease hangar space in St. Augustine Airport underscores our commitment to providing exceptional service and support to HondaJet owners and operators across the region," Banyan said in a recent press release. Services include inspections, modifications, avionics upgrades and aircraft-on-ground support. Charles Amento, vice president/director of MRO Services, described the airport's location as convenient, and the support received from NFRA as exceptional. "The airport staff have made the transition seamless," he said in a press release. "We look forward to providing top-notch service and support to HondaJet owners and operators throughout the Southeastern United States from our new base in St. Augustine."

Minnesota: Mayo One Helicopter Forced to Land After Bird Strike

Post Bulletin (4/8, Todd) reports that one of Mayo Clinic's air ambulances was forced to make an emergency landing during the evening on Friday, April 5, 2024, after a bird struck the helicopter's windshield. According to a statement from Mayo Clinic, the air ambulance was transporting one patient and a crew of four when a bird struck the windshield of the aircraft causing damage. The helicopter landed at an athletic field in Plainview, Minnesota, as a precautionary measure, and "care continued uninterrupted until the patient was safely transported by ambulance to the receiving medical center," according to the statement. No one onboard the helicopter was injured due to the collision with the bird.

Arkansas: Plane Crashes Near Clarksville Municipal Airport

KHBS (4/8, Roberts) reports that an airplane crashed near Clarksville Municipal Airport in Johnson County, Arkansas, according to Jim Looney, airport manager. Four people were on board the plane. There were injuries, but none were life-threatening. The twin-engine prop plane lost power in one of the engines during takeoff just after 2 p.m. It landed in a wooded area. The airport has a 4,500-foot runway and a full-length parallel taxiway, according to the city of Clarksville website. The airport is about 18 miles east of the Courthouse Square on Main Street in town.

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Federal Highway Administration

Wisconsin: Razing I-794 Has Its Appeal. But Third Ward Business Operators Worry About Traffic Impact

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (4/8, Daykin) reports that Jim Plaisted understands the appeal of replacing part of downtown Milwaukee's Interstate 794 with a surface street. But he also has to "deal with the reality" faced by his constituents: Historic Third Ward business operators who are worried about increased neighborhood traffic. Those concerns should be eased by the likelihood that razing part of I-794 between the Hoan Bridge and just west of the Milwaukee River will more evenly disperse traffic throughout downtown, says Taylor Korslin, a freeway removal advocate. Plaisted, Historic Third Ward Association executive director, and Korslin, an architect who's a representative of Rethink I-794, spoke at a Monday meeting of the Greater Milwaukee Committee. More than 100 members of the civic group were in the audience. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation in 2023 disclosed seven conceptual plans to repair I-794 and two plans to remove it. Along with a freeway removal option, the agency by fall plans to narrow those plans to one option to rebuild freeway bridges within I-794's current alignment and keep all existing freeway access ramps, and another option to rebuild bridges with a tightened alignment that consolidates ramps.

After gathering additional public input, WisDOT plans to choose a preferred alternative by the end of 2024. Final design work is to occur in 2025 and 2026, with construction work starting in 2027 or 2028 if the \$300 million project obtains federal and state funding. Plaisted told the Greater Milwaukee Committee group that the Third Ward is "on fire" with development that includes the new 333 Water apartment tower, 333 N. Water St., and plans for Foxtown Landing, a taproom, distillery and restaurant at 412-420 N. Plankinton Ave. He said Third Ward businesses have learned to handle I-794's barrier between the neighborhood and downtown through such efforts as Brighten the Passage, which created murals and new lighting beneath the freeway; Riverwalk Commons, which added pickleball courts and other public space underneath the freeway along North Water Street, and the off-leash dog park that will be built just north of Foxtown Landing.

California: Repairs on Big Sur's Collapsed Highway 1 Start This Week. No Telling When They Will End

Los Angeles Times (4/8, Toohey) reports that stabilization efforts are expected to begin this week on a stretch of Highway 1 in Big Sur where a portion of the roadway crumbled into the ocean last month — temporarily stranding tourists and residents along the scenic central

coast. Since the collapse last month, travel has been severely limited for hundreds of residents now living between two sections of highway damaged by a series of landslides. After installing some safety rails this weekend, California Department of Transportation officials said Monday that teams were staging equipment and finalizing plans to begin more extensive repair work this week. "That's the first order of business, to stabilize that edge of the roadway," said Kevin Drabinski, a Caltrans spokesperson. On Tuesday, contractors for the state are expected to begin drilling vertical anchors in the damaged southbound lane, jump-starting the stabilization work, according to an update Sunday. Drabinski did not have further information on the details of the stabilization work. He said there is not yet a timeline for its completion, but he said he hopes officials will have an estimate later this week.

Tennessee: Should Knoxville's \$42 Million Federal Grant Count as Atonement for Urban Renewal?

Knoxville News Sentinel (4/8, Dennis) asks should spending a newly secured federal grant of \$42.6 million on reconnecting East Knoxville to downtown count as compensation for the lasting impacts of urban renewal? It's a question that looms as city leaders grapple with how best to address the historical injustices inflicted by past policies. On April 8, the African American Equity Restoration Task Force, which is working to find solutions for disenfranchisement of Black community members, will discuss whether the federal grant money should be count toward its goal of investing \$100 million in neighborhoods. Knoxville secured the \$42.6 million federal grant in March to improve transportation links between East Knoxville and downtown, with plans to revamp the James White Parkway. The changes will increase access to job opportunities, activities and recreational facilities for East Knoxville residents, who were physically cut off after the urban removal changes of the 1960s and '70s. Black homes, places of worship and businesses were leveled to make way for the James White Parkway and community buildings.

Rebekah Jane Justice, the chief of urban design and development for the city, told Knox News last month city officials have yet to determine to what extent, if any, the federal grant will factor into its commitment to meaningfully address urban removal. City councilwoman Gwen McKenzie is hopeful the money will go toward the work of the task force and its goal of securing \$100 million to compensate for Black families and business owners affected by urban removal. Discussions and a potential vote by the task force could take place April 8. "Nobody would have received this grant funding if it were not for the urban renewal portion of the application when it was written. So absolutely those dollars should be attributed to the \$100 million in the resolution. But I want to be clear, that is not the end goal. That is just the beginning," she said.

Rhode Island: RIDOT Shifting Crossover Point on I-195 by the Washington Bridge

WPRI (4/8, Crowley, Burnell) reports that some new traffic patterns will be implemented in Providence this week as part of the Rhode Island Department of Transportation's (RIDOT) efforts to ease congestion. RIDOT is working toward providing three lanes of travel in both directions of I-195 over the Washington Bridge. Overnight on Monday, crews will be shifting the crossover point for westbound traffic a half-mile closer to the Washington Bridge ahead of the Tuesday-morning commute. RIDOT says the shift will create a work zone needed to implement the three-lane configuration by April 22. Drivers will not need to adjust their

routes but should stay in their lanes through the new crossover. RIDOT says it will be launching an informational ad campaign to prepare travelers. WJAR (4/8) provides additional coverage.

Georgia: A Stitch and More - 3 Parks Have Been Suggested Above Atlanta Highways

Atlanta Journal Constitution (4/8, O'Shea) reports that the Stitch, an innovative park idea that would straddle the busy Atlanta Downtown Connector is part tunnel and part pedestrian-friendly greenspace. The name is drawn from the project's goal of stitching — or reconnecting — parts of Downtown long divided by the many-laned interstate highway south of the Civic Center MARTA station. The project got a boost with news of a \$157.6 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation to help fund the first phase of the project. The Stitch is not the only such elevated park or highway cap proposed for Atlanta. Elevated greenspace projects have also been proposed in Midtown and Buckhead. And a smaller-scale highway greenspace opened in 2006, when a pedestrian-friendly makeover of the 5th Street bridge over the Connector was completed near Georgia Tech. Here are some details about the Downtown, Midtown and Buckhead proposals.

Maine: Republicans, DOT Chief Rip Democrats' Late Move to Divert Road and Bridge Funding

Maine Public Radio (4/8, Mistler) reports that in the pre-dawn hours on Saturday, Democrats on the Legislature's appropriations committee advanced a change to Maine's two-year budget totaling roughly \$100 million in new spending. However, two changes to transportation funding are drawing fierce criticism from Republicans and the Mills administration, who say it will yield a \$60 million loss annually for roads and bridges, while upending the traditional budgeting process. The committee finalized the spending package at roughly 3 a.m. Saturday, but not before Democrats introduced a pair of amendments to transportation funding that made bleary-eyed Republicans like Rep. Jack Ducharme, of Madison, see red. "And this why people don't trust state government," Ducharme said. "Look outside. It's dark." Ducharme was objecting to an amendment that would take an \$11 million in surplus transportation funding this year, and \$60 million in each subsequent year, and plow it into the General Fund for yet-to-be specified uses. That funding is available in part because of a bipartisan deal enacted by the Legislature less than a year ago that used a portion of sales taxes on vehicle purchases and other use taxes for the highway budget and road and bridge projects. The deal was championed at the time as a sustainable source of funds for transportation improvements, which for years have been reliant on voter-approved bonds.

California: Carlsbad Moving Forward with Plan to Realign Stretch of Highway 101

KUSI (4/8, Dawson) reports that the city of Carlsbad is charging ahead with a plan to relocate a segment of a historic boulevard amid rising sea levels and heightened flooding concerns. Last week, the city's Beach Preservation Commission voted unanimously to recommend realigning a one-mile stretch of the coastal Highway 101, also known as Carlsbad Boulevard, in an all-encompassing approach referred to as "retreat now." The alternative would have

been a phased approach where changes would be made to the impacted roadway, which runs from Manzano Drive in the north to Island Way in the south, incrementally over a 96-year period. The southern tip of Highway 101 has a long history of erosion and instability, particularly near Las Encinas Creek. City officials say events like high surf or coastal storms have often rendered the roadway inaccessible due to flooding. Carlsbad officials have looked to solve this coastal overflow by doing emergency work under temporary permits from the state's Coastal Commission, such as extending the rock barriers that line the roadway — a step the city has taken at least twice since 2015.

Iowa: Cedar Rapids Lands \$56.4 Million Federal Grant to Fund New Eighth Avenue Arc of Justice Bridge

Corridor Business Journal (4/8) reports that the city of Cedar Rapids has secured a \$56.4 million federal grant to fund construction of the new Eighth Avenue Arc of Justice bridge over the Cedar River. The grant represents “years of hard work and perseverance” pursuing federal funding for the project, city officials said in a news release. The grant will support the replacement of the Eighth Avenue bridge over the Cedar River as part of the city's flood control system. The U.S. Department of Transportation announced the grant award April 5 as part of the Federal Highway Administration's Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) discretionary grant program. “This project holds significance for the entire community,” Cedar Rapids city manager Jeff Pomeranz said. “I am incredibly proud of the team effort. Our perseverance has paid off. This federal funding award is an acknowledgement of the importance of the flood control system in Cedar Rapids and the effectiveness of the city's approach.” The city's success in earning this grant award underscores years of efforts by city leaders to secure funding for the project.

Ohio: US Department of Transportation Awards Cincinnati Funding for Landslide Mitigation

WLWT (4/8, Dietz) reports that the United States Department of Transportation has awarded the city of Cincinnati over \$10 million in federal funding for landslide mitigation efforts. Congressman Greg Landsman (OH-01) announced the grant on Monday.

The goal of the funding is to provide long-term construction remedies at 10 locations along major routes throughout Cincinnati that are prone to landslides, hillside slippage and retaining wall failures. The federal funding is being awarded through DOT's Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) grant program.

New York: South Grand Island Bridges to Receive Critical Upgrades

WGRZ (4/8) reports that the south Grand Island Bridges will soon get some upgrades to ensure the bridges are protected against possible earthquakes thanks to a grant. The announcement was made by US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (NY-D) Monday. Nearly \$40 million in funding from the Department of Transportation's Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation (PROTECT) will be used to make critical upgrades to protect against earthquakes. “Western NY's South Grand Island Bridges are lifelines for Niagara Falls and Tonawanda, connecting communities to the

mainland and carrying thousands of cars every day. But age and deterioration have taken a toll on many sections of the bridge, and recent events, from the earthquake we experienced downstate to the tragic bridge collapse in Baltimore, have brought the need to make repairs to this vital corridor for Western NY to the top of mind. That is why I am proud to deliver a whopping \$39 million to help rehabilitate the South Grand Island Bridges and bolster resilient infrastructure needed to maintain these vital corridors for Western NY," said Senator Schumer in a released statement. "This substantial funding means safer bridges, good-paying construction jobs, better bike and pedestrian infrastructure, and is exactly the kind of long overdue investments I had in mind when I lead the Bipartisan Infrastructure & Jobs Act to passage."

North Carolina: North Carolina Could Get a New Interstate Highway. Here's Where

Triangle Business Journal (4/8, Finnegan) reports that North Carolina, and the Northern Triad in particular, could soon be getting a new interstate highway. Officials with the Carolina Core are working on a Future Interstate designation for U.S. 421 from Wilkesboro through Yadkinville and on to I-40 in Winston-Salem. At this point, luck seems to be on their side — the state's congressional delegation and economic development staffers in Forsyth, Yadkin, and Wilkes counties were recently told the number for the hoped-for highway will be Future Interstate 777 (U.S. 421 intersects with I-77). "We are excited about the potential opportunity to designate a second Future Interstate along U.S. 421 in the Carolina Core. Our current effort is for the segment spanning from Wilkesboro through Yadkinville and on to I-40 in Winston-Salem," said Loren Hill, Carolina Core regional economic development director. "Along with the already designated Future I-685 from I-85 to I-95, this would further improve connectivity and commerce throughout the state, while increasing our region's economic competitiveness." The Carolina Core was created by the Piedmont Triad Partnership in 2019 to promote economic development along U.S. Highway 421 between Winston-Salem and Sanford, especially at the region's megasites. In order to increase the region's economic competitiveness and to enhance safety and mobility, the Carolina Core has been working with local, state and federal government officials to get two segments of U.S. 421 designated as Future Interstate highways.

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Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration

FMCSA Has Rejected 34% of Under-21 Truck Driver Applications

Freight Waves (4/8, Gallagher) argues that the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration says only 113 motor carriers have applied for its under-21 truck driver apprenticeship program since the agency began accepting applications in July 2022, a dismal sign for an initiative that had been expected to recruit up to 1,000 carriers and 3,000 drivers. The data, included in a fiscal year 2022 report submitted to Congress last week by FMCSA, also revealed that as of February 2024, FMCSA has rejected 34% — or 38 of the 113 applications received. The agency has fully approved only 30%, or 34 of the applications. The applications that were rejected "have been disapproved due to not meeting FMCSA's safety performance

criteria,” the agency stated. “An additional 36 applications have met FMCSA’s safety qualification criteria (“pre-qualifier”), but do not yet have a registered apprenticeship in place or have not yet provided their registered apprenticeship number to FMCSA.” In a report covering FY2021 — also submitted to Congress last week — FMCSA provided similarly lackluster results for an under-21 CDL pilot program it launched in 2019 and completed in August 2021 for those that had been in the military. “Despite significant outreach and recruitment efforts, only a very small number of drivers participated” in the under-21 military program, FMCSA stated. There was not enough interest from the intended participants in operating a CMV in interstate commerce as a profession to justify continuing the program.”

Montana, Opinion: Self-Driving Semis... How Would They Handle Montana?

An opinion piece from KYSS (4/8, Sauerwein) argues that CBS News is reporting Texas is beginning to test self-driving semi trucks. The tests will be held in the Dallas area, so if you're reading this in Montana don't worry you will be safe... for now. It's one thing to drive a truck with no operator through North Texas. I'm fairly sure it's flat in North Texas and one would think it's relatively easier to drive through the plains than the mountains of Montana. This led me to think about how would this experiment go in The Last Best Place. Some concerns come to mind. I'm 99% sure there would be a negative response from the public to it based on how people reacted to automated CARS in Missoula. The biggest concern to arise is autonomous semis driving through the mountains sounds really, really dangerous. It's dangerous enough for humans to drive over Lookout or Bozeman Pass. What happens when a semi needs to pull over and attach chains to the tires? Can a self-driving semi feature a chains mode? Or if the brakes go out can a self-driven semi veer off the interstate into a runaway ramp? On the positive side, maybe we avoid all semi-related crimes altogether.

Wisconsin Enacts Two New Laws Permitting Certain Heavier Truck Loads

Land Line (4/8, Goble) reports that two new Wisconsin laws are touted by supporters to help reduce the number of trucks on roadways in exchange for permitting certain heavier truck loads. The first new law covers permits for oversize and overweight transport of pig iron. Previously SB363, the new law creates a definition for metallic or nonmetallic scrap that is identical to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation’s definition for recyclable scrap. The new definition explicitly includes pig iron. Sen. Joan Ballweg, R-Markesan, has described pig iron as a raw material to support the utilization of scrap iron and steel to create new iron and steel products. Speaking to the Senate Transportation and Local Government Committee, she said her legislation allows pig iron to be transported by trucks using the state DOT’s garbage, refuse, and recyclable scrap permit. The permit allows trucks to carry overweight loads. Ballweg said that carriers previously were able to transport pig iron under the aforementioned permit, but WisDOT recently began enforcing their interpretation that pig iron could not be transported using this permit.

Kodiak Forms Autonomous Truck Council with Walmart, UPS

Transport Topics (4/8, Wolf) reports that Kodiak Robotics launched an advisory council to bolster its efforts to commercialize autonomous trucks with the help of trucking industry

leaders, the company announced March 27. The Kodiak Industry Advisory Council will focus on product development, deployment and public engagement related to commercializing autonomous trucks. The Arkansas Trucking Association, Loadsmith, Walmart, Werner Enterprises and UPS are among the inaugural members. “Kodiak’s Industry Advisory Council was designed to bring a variety of additional perspectives, including those of fleets, regulators and trucking industry groups, to determine how we can best scale our technology in the coming years,” Michael Wiesinger, vice president of commercialization at Kodiak, told Transport Topics. “The Industry Advisory Council will help us shape our approach as we work to integrate our autonomous trucking technology into fleets’ existing operations and ensure we solve our customers’ biggest pain points.” Kodiak is a technology company focused on autonomous transportation for both the trucking and defense industries. It has forged partnerships with companies across the trucking space since its founding in 2018. That includes for the deployment of real-world freight movements using its technology. The council aims to focus those relationships to better utilize their expertise.

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Wall Street Journal, Editorial: Feather-Bedding on the Railroads

An editorial from Wall Street Journal (4/8) argues that high prices are a top reason for President Biden’s low approval rating, but his policy moves suggest he’s putting union interests ahead of consumers. His Administration is mandating larger crews for thousands of freight trains, driving up the cost of goods with no clear benefit to safety. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) finalized a rule last week requiring at least two crew members on most commercial trains. The six largest carriers and many smaller regionals have until June to comply. The agency will grant exemptions only to smaller railroads that successfully plead for special relief. Railroads, unions and lawmakers have quarreled over crew size for years, but President Biden has trumped the debate. He demanded punitive action toward Norfolk Southern and other carriers in the wake of the fiery derailment in Ohio last year. “This was an act of greed that was 100% preventable,” he said on the anniversary of the crash. Congress has failed to pass a bill mandating two-man crews, but the Administration is doing it anyway.

The policy is ill-suited to the Ohio crash, since the Norfolk Southern train had a three-man crew, as do many large freighters. It would also do little for safety. The FRA dismissed the major studies of the issue, which showed that incident rates are roughly equal between one- and two-man trains. Single-man trains have become standard in Western Europe among large and small carriers, and they are expected to grow in share as railroads deploy improved tools to detect heat and stress. Safety aside, rail unions have sought a crew-size mandate for years to prop up dues-paying employment. The largest union, SMART-TD, issued a celebratory statement about the mandate, which it says will “protect the country from the railroad companies’ greed.” Union officials spoke next to Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, underscoring that government and Big Labor are partners in the move.

The FRA estimated the 10-year cost of the rule at only \$6.6 million because so many railroads already employ two-man crews. But that doesn’t count the opportunity cost.

Most large carriers use two-man crews today, but they plan to employ more single-crewed trains as safety technology continues to improve. Labor is railroads' biggest operating expense, and reducing the work force would lower the long-term cost of shipping. The new rule shows how Democrats continue to rule by executive fiat when it suits their political purposes. Mr. Biden wants to reinforce his Big Labor support this year after angering some in the railroad union by signing a labor agreement into law to prevent a strike in 2022. All of this reduces the chances that investments in efficiency will reduce the cost of shipping. A bad policy is being willed into force by a combination of labor interests and political opportunism. Your government at work.

Montana: Trial to Begin Against Buffett's Railroad Company Over Asbestos Deaths in Montana Town

AP (4/8, Hanson, Brown) reports that a trial begins Monday against Warren Buffett's BNSF Railway over the lung cancer deaths of two people who lived in a small Montana town near the U.S.-Canada border where thousands of people were exposed to asbestos from a vermiculite mine. The widespread contamination over decades led the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 2009 to declare the first-ever public health emergency during a Superfund cleanup. The site is one of the deadliest under the program. The W.R. Grace & Co. mine near Libby, Montana, produced contaminated vermiculite that exposed residents to asbestos, sickening thousands and leading to the deaths of hundreds. The estates of Thomas Wells of LaConner, Oregon, and Joyce Walder of Westminster, California, filed a wrongful death lawsuit in 2021, arguing that BNSF and its corporate predecessors stored asbestos-laden vermiculite in a large rail yard in town before shipping it to plants across the U.S. where it was heated to expand it for use as insulation. The railroad failed to contain the dust from the vermiculite, allowing asbestos to be blown around town without warning residents about its dangers, the lawsuit states.

Louisiana: Will Gretna Finally Move the Railroad Out of Downtown? Here's Why It Could Happen.

New Orleans Times-Picayune (4/8, Fazio) reports that as happens several times a day, a train horn blared through an otherwise serene April afternoon in downtown Gretna's quaint historic district lined with trees and businesses. Minutes later, rail cars rolled down the middle of Fourth Street, past homes and churches and schools, battling for the right of way with parked and moving cars. Train interruptions that bisect the city of about 17,000 have become part of life in Gretna over the years. Occasionally a conductor rushes to nearby businesses to try to find the owner of a car blocking the track. Rarely, cars have been hit and residents trapped in their homes. Once, a house burned down when a fire truck was stuck by a slow-moving train. Officials fear a derailment similar to what happened last February in East Palestine, Ohio would be disastrous. For two decades, local officials have tried to relocate the tracks, making little progress. Emboldened by federal protections, railroads are formidable opponents. Similar efforts over the years to move tracks from Metairie Road in Old Metairie have sputtered. But with a planned development in Plaquemines Parish that could exponentially increase rail traffic — and support from the railroads and local interests — the relocation is both more plausible and more urgent. "We won't survive," said Gretna Mayor Belinda Constant. "We won't be able to move around this place, we'll be blocked by rail traffic."

Indiana: Disabled Norfolk Southern Train Blocks Majority of Railroad Crossing in Mishawaka

WSBT (4/8) reports that Norfolk Southern is experiencing a “locomotive Failure.” The failure has blocked the majority of railroad crossings within Mishawaka City limits. The company is aware of the issue and has no timeline of when the crossings will reopen. Please use the railroad underpasses at Ironwood Dr, Church St/Union St, and Capital Ave to avoid travel delays.

Pennsylvania: Changes Begin for Some Central Pennsylvania Amtrak Riders

WHTM (4/8, Bell, Kaplan) reports that Amtrak is currently using buses to replace some of their trains between Harrisburg and Lancaster while they are working on rail construction. WHTM reported back in March 2024 when Amtrak first announced a series of changes that were coming to the line connecting Harrisburg and Lancaster. Due to these updates, Amtrak began replacing some of their train rides with buses instead. So far, the buses are on time, but nonetheless, are a little slower than the trains. These updates will be going on through Thanksgiving. PennLive (4/8, Mautner) and WGAL (4/8, Reyes) provide additional coverage.

STB Denies Coalition to Stop CPKC Request

Railway Age (4/8, Vantuono) reports that the Surface Transportation Board on April 5, 2024, by unanimous vote, denied the request of the Coalition to Stop CPKC to modify the reporting requirements imposed in STB’s approval of Canadian Pacific’s acquisition of Kansas City Southern to create CPKC (Canadian Pacific Kansas City). STB’s denial is detailed in Docket No. FD 36500 (Sub-No. 6) (download below). The Coalition members are the Village of Bensenville, Village of Itasca, City of Wood Dale, Village of Roselle, Village of Schaumburg, Village of Hanover Park, Village of Bartlett, City of Elgin and DuPage County, all in Illinois and along Metra’s Milwaukee District West (MD-W) Line. The Coalition’s request was buried in the weeds, involving freight train operating and consist length minutia: “[M]odifications to two aspects of the data CPKC is required to provide regarding operations on the MD-W Line ... First, the Coalition requests that CPKC report the average length of CP through freight trains traversing the MD-W line between Randall Road and Tower B-17 for all weeks from April 2018 to April 2023, for all weeks from April 2023 to November 15, 2023, and going forward in CPKC’s monthly submissions. The Coalition asserts that, in approving ... the merger, the Board relied on findings contained in the Final Environmental Impact Statement that examined the potential impact of the merger on vehicle delays at road crossings using ‘average train length’ data provided by CPKC. Thus, the Coalition argues that CPKC’s reporting of average train length is necessary ‘to accurately assess, on an “apples to apples” basis,’ impacts of the merger on crossing delays.’

Texas: Federal Law and State Common Law Preemption Questions at the Texas Supreme Court

A blog post from The Heritage Foundation (4/8, Lucas) notes that courts are divided on whether federal regulations of rail carriers preempt state common law negligence claims against those carriers. The Texas Supreme Court held that the ICCT Act’s provisions did not preempt common law negligence claims concerning railroad crossing safety. In sum,

“railroad safety is governed by a regime of cooperative federalism, not top-down federal uniformity.”

Alabama: Train Derailment Causes Road Closure in Shelby County

Trussville Tribune (4/8) reports that a train derailment that occurred at approximately 11 a.m. today has caused a road closure in Shelby County, according to ALEA Senior Trooper Vu Quang. U.S. 31 is currently blocked at the intersection of Alabama 25 and will be for an undetermined amount of time. ALDOT and troopers with ALEA's Highway Patrol Division are on the scene assisting with traffic control and will continue to monitor the situation. As of 12:54 p.m. the roadway has been reopened. WABM (4/8, Wyatt) provides additional coverage.

North Dakota: East Grand Forks 'Quiet Zone' to Be Established by Next Spring

Grand Forks Herald (4/8, Voigt) reports that by this time next year, loud train horns through downtown East Grand Forks will likely be a thing of the past. When a quiet zone is established either this fall or next spring, the trains using the railroad tracks between Third and Fourth Streets near Sacred Heart Catholic Church and School will no longer use their horns at the crossings. As part of the process to establish the quiet zone, the city will update two aging downtown train crossings and eliminate a third. The first phase of the project will be the reconstruction of the Central Avenue crossing followed by the reconstruction of the Second Avenue Northeast crossing. The final phase is the closure and realignment of Third Street Northwest removal of the crossing there. Construction for the project, which has been in the works since at least August 2017, will start this summer, and much of the work is expected to be completed this fall. The variable is whether parts for new signals will arrive before the construction season ends, which could delay the establishment of the quiet zone, said Steve Emery, East Grand Forks city engineer.

Nevada, California: High-Speed Train Work Continuing Southwest of Las Vegas, I-15 Shoulders Set for Night Closures in California

KLAS (4/8, Haas) reports that preliminary work on the Brightline West high-speed train is continuing, with surveying and drilling in Nevada moving closer to the California border, according to information released on Monday. Some nighttime closures are possible on Interstate 15 shoulders near Hesperia, California, and in Cajon Pass. Work that began in January involves crews in both states working in the median of I-15. Surveying and geotechnical boring is part of the preparation for constructing the new rail line that the company says will be “the first true high-speed passenger rail system in the nation.” A trip from Las Vegas to Rancho Cucamonga is expected to take about two hours — half the time it would take to drive. Drilling and soil sampling help engineers better understand the ground where tracks will be laid. Utility potholing work is also proceeding. Some short-term closures of freeway shoulders will be required, so drivers should use caution in work zones and watch for detour signs and speed limit changes. Crews will be working primarily in daylight hours to minimize traffic disruptions.

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New York Times: Skip the Traffic - Commuters Turn to Ferries to Get Around

New York Times (4/8, Baker) reports that as remote work reshapes the way people live and travel around cities, Americans are taking to the waterways not only as part of their commute but also as part of their daily lives. Some coastal cities are seeing ferry ridership bounce back after a decline during the pandemic, and growing interest in water transit is spurring both new types of ferry services and waterfront development. In Bremerton, Wash., a fast-growing Seattle suburb on Puget Sound, a \$141 million development opened less than 100 yards from a high-speed passenger ferry that travels to downtown Seattle in 30 minutes; its older car ferry service takes an hour. Carteret, N.J., is launching a ferry service to Manhattan, adjacent to a waterfront film and television production complex. Ferry service is also central to the development of a new community on a former naval base off San Francisco.

The ferry boom comes as municipal governments are trying to address a variety of social, economic and environmental challenges, and as some of the country's largest cities look to water transport to ease traffic, connect communities and meet housing and commercial development goals. Last year, the Federal Transit Administration announced grants totaling \$220.2 million for ferry systems. And local governments are offering tax incentives to redevelop industrial zones. Ferry systems are expanding beyond traditional commuter and tourist routes to meet the "discretionary travel patterns" of remote workers and retirees, said Ryan Avery, interim director of the Washington State Transportation Center at the University of Washington. "They're doing it for shopping, going to a football, soccer or baseball game," he said. "The market changed," he continued. "People also want faster service." He noted the changes were also opening up opportunities for new types of terminal designs — as mixed-used hubs offering other transit connections, rather than as a single-use building surrounded by a parking lot.

District of Columbia: Police 'Real-Time Crime Center' Launches with Live Video Monitoring

Washington Post (4/8, Hermann) reports that moments after Thursday's shooting that killed a teenager on a Metro platform in Northeast Washington, D.C. police officers at a new command center four miles away were watching the chaos unfold on their computers. Instant access to the Metro transit system's surveillance videos and a live feed enabled the staff at the District's new Real-Time Crime Center to quickly upload photos of a person of interest to social media, and to share them with the public. "To be able to do this in the very moment is a breakthrough," D.C. police Chief Pamela A. Smith said at the center's formal opening on Monday. She said detectives are making progress on an arrest. The new center, in Judiciary Square, includes video screens that show symbols for emergency calls and how serious they might be, and information from ShotSpotter, a system of citywide sensors that alert police to gunshot noises. The crime center, Smith said, "is the new epicenter for how [the department] responds to crime and investigates cases."

Pennsylvania: SEPTA's Drexel Station Reopens with Major

Upgrades, Including Efforts to Connect It to Amtrak's 30th Street Station

Philadelphia Inquirer (4/8, Perez-Castells) reports that SEPTA's 30th Street Station officially opened on Monday with upgrades, and a new name: Drexel Station at 30th Street. The renovations include efforts to connect to Amtrak's 30th Street Station, something transit riders have wanted for decades. The station, which connects riders to the Market-Frankford Line, five trolley lines, and several bus routes, has been undergoing renovations for several years. Drexel University also partnered with SEPTA late last year to acquire exclusive naming rights to the station for five years under a \$3.1 million agreement. "A refurbished, more accessible and more navigable Drexel Station at 30th Street is a huge quality of life win for everyone," said John Fry, Drexel University president. "We will have more pedestrian traffic on the sidewalks which translates into a more vibrant street life. That promotes economic activity, and of course, enhances public safety." Renovations include a new glass headhouse, upgraded stairs, escalators and elevators, as well as an expanded mezzanine, new tiles and brighter lighting. The station is also SEPTA's first to feature updated signage from the agency's new way-finding system which aims to make the transit system easier to navigate.

"The new Drexel Station at 30th Street will play an important and growing role in Philadelphia's economy as a major portal in the rapidly evolving innovation district here," said Terry Garcia Crews, regional administrator at the Federal Transit Administration. Construction on the station renovations kicked off in 2020, and cost \$50.3 million to complete. Funding for the project includes a \$15 million federal grant, \$32.2 million in PennDot funds — SEPTA's capital funding from the state — a \$1.1 million match from the city, and a \$2 million investment from Brandywine Realty Trust. The inauguration of the new station comes as the transit agency is struggling to get ridership back to pre-pandemic levels. SEPTA faces a projected \$240 million deficit this year as it considers service cuts and fare hikes. "I've asked elected leaders to imagine the types of projects SEPTA could undertake if we were only funded like our peer agencies," said Richards. "Drexel Station would not be the exception, it would be the standard. We want to have every station looking like this one." WPVI (4/8) provides additional coverage.

Washington Post, Opinion: Being 'Tough on Crime' Isn't an Appeal to White Voters

An opinion piece in Washington Post (4/8, McCammond) argues that the conventional wisdom from politicians and progressives alike is that any Democrat who talks tough on crime is pandering to moderate White voters or disaffected Republicans. That's wrong, and surveys show that ignoring the problem would abandon a key part of Democrats' base. Reducing crime ranks among the top 10 issues for voters overall, according to Pew Research data, but there's also a striking race gap: Sixty-eight percent of Black voters say it should be a top priority for President Biden compared to just 54 percent of White voters. This trend was also true in the 2022 midterm elections, when only one-third of White Democratic voters said violent crime was very important to how they would vote compared to 82 percent of Black Democratic voters.

No one understands the potency of this issue more than Democratic Gov. Kathy Hochul, who in 2022 ended up in the closest gubernatorial race in New York since

1994 after Republican challenger Lee Zeldin relentlessly campaigned on residents' fears of violence. Since then, she has tried to recalibrate to help Democrats avoid similar attacks in 2024. Her decision last month to deploy the National Guard to New York City's subway system for increased bag checks reflects a significant shift in how Democrats tackle crime. "These efforts are not always associated with Democrats," Hochul said in a recent phone interview. "But it doesn't mean that we are taking the Republican playbook. It's our job to do this. This is not a new awakening. I've always believed that it's our job to protect people."

Last year, Hochul signed stricter bail laws as a way to address crime, angering progressives who feared the changes would result in more people being jailed and "mass inequality." While Hochul continues to face opposition from her party's left wing, they're just not as influential in the crime debate as they once were. Democrats in places like New York City, Boston, Chicago and San Francisco are more in line with Hochul's approach than her critics. It's remarkable how much the conversation around policing has changed since George Floyd's murder in 2020. His senseless killing ignited a movement to reform the criminal justice system and rethink how police departments operate. But passionate proposals from a small minority of leftists, namely to defund the police, exacerbated the perception that Democrats are out of touch with reality, handing Republicans a winning attack in competitive races. Now, more moderate Democrats are working to change the age-old perception that their party is "soft" on crime. "This should be an area where Democrats are leaning in," Hochul told me. "Lean into the fact that Republicans are the ones who aren't serious about public safety or fighting crime because they're not serious about getting guns off the streets. ... That's a big difference between us."

California, Opinion: Orange County's Streetcar Struggles Serve as a Warning to Surrounding Communities

An opinion piece in Orange County Register (4/8, Joffe) argues that Although California High-Speed Rail is unlikely to ever reach Anaheim's overbuilt ARTIC station, Orange County nonetheless has its own rail boondoggle: the OC Streetcar. Like high-speed rail, the streetcar is behind schedule, overbudget, and unlikely to provide the benefits project sponsors promised. When first presented to the federal government, the 4.15-mile streetcar line was expected to cost \$289 million. The latest cost estimate of \$579 million may still be revised upward now that the Orange County Transportation Authority has further extended contracts with two of its engineering consulting firms. The project was originally expected to finish in 2021, but that was pushed back to 2024 and now to late 2025. According to an OCTA spokesperson, "identifying the location of old utilities in city streets, contaminated soil and the discovery of Native American remains" contributed to the delays. Although construction is 85 percent complete and the track has been fully laid, testing has yet to begin. Experience with previous transit projects around the U.S. shows that problems identified during testing can take years to resolve, so, even today, the inception of revenue service next year is still not a sure thing.

District of Columbia: Circulator Bus - What to Know About the Mayor's Shutdown Proposal

WRC (4/8, Tuss) reports that there's frustration and even some anger in D.C. with plans to possibly shut down Circulator bus service. Mayor Muriel Bowser said the plan

is just one of the major cuts that could be necessary to close a big budget gap for the next fiscal year. The iconic red, yellow and silver buses began running in 2005. Nearly 20 years later, the engines could turn off for good as part of a plan to close a \$700 million budget shortfall in D.C. Part of the problem, according to D.C. officials, is that ridership on the Circulator hasn't returned to where it was pre-pandemic. Bike share and scooters have become more popular since the pandemic, further taking riders away from the Circulator. Taking a look at some bus stops on Monday, few people were waiting to catch a ride. Bus rider Ella Louise Darrell said the city shouldn't take away the Circulator. She thought back to days of better bus service in the District. "It was D.C. Transit when I came here in '59 and they were very good and They came every 10 minutes. And now it's a mess with Metro and the buses are filthy dirty," she said.

Sources with direct knowledge of the plan for the buses say Metro could possibly assume some of the responsibility for the Circulator routes. The Circulator started with two routes and has now expanded to five that crisscross the city. The buses are expensive assets that likely would not just be put away; someone would have to buy them. DC District Department of Transportation Director Sharon Kershbaum told WRC during a recent interview that the District remains committed to expanding bus service overall. "We are all in on supporting our bus network. We have built about 12 miles of priority bus lanes, and we are on the path to build about 25 over the next few years," she said. One major impact: Riding the Circulator costs just \$1. Metrobus rides start at \$2. The D.C. Council will have just over two months to consider and vote on the mayor's budget.

Nevada: Las Vegas Monorail Isn't Closing, Counter to Social Media Rumors

KLAS (4/8, Haas) reports that the Las Vegas Monorail begs to differ. As buzz built over the weekend about the aging transit system's future, the @lvmonorail account said definitively on X (formerly Twitter): "The report that the Las Vegas Monorail is winding down operations is 100% inaccurate. The Monorail is operating very successfully and the LVCVA has no plans to cease operations." That post was at 5:30 p.m. on Sunday. The monorail is owned by the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, which bought it for \$24 million in 2020. LVCVA CEO and President Steve Hill told 8 News Now at the time it was about efficiency. "We feel like we have the opportunity to operate the system more efficiently, simply because of who we are. We have the ability to borrow money at a significantly lesser interest rate. We have office space, they are currently leasing office space," Hill said. But since then, the Las Vegas Loop — Elon Musk's tunnel system that shuttles passengers in Tesla EVs — has established a foothold. Growing from an initial plan to carry convention-goers around the sprawling Las Vegas Convention Center, the Loop is on the verge of opening stations at Westgate Las Vegas and Wynn/Encore. It's already running at Resorts World, and maps show an ambitious plan to establish stations from downtown to Reid International Airport. Can the monorail compete? It could cost \$200 million to replace the aging trains, Hill said in 2020. He said he expects a different system to replace it as it breaks down in the coming years.

Rhode Island: RIPTA Bus Tunnel to Undergo \$15 Million Facelift

WPRI (4/8, Doiron, Kalunian) reports that beneath some of Providence's most important real estate is a bus tunnel that hundreds of thousands of Rhode Islanders ride through every single year. The East Side Transit Tunnel was first built in 1914 to help

trolleys reach the top of College Hill. The 1,800-foot underground passageway is now solely used by buses as a direct connection between the city's East Side and downtown. But the tunnel has been closed since late March and won't be back open until mid-September. That's because the R.I. Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) is preparing the 110-year-old structure for a \$15 million facelift. RIPTA project manager Jack Plouffe recently brought WPRI on a walking tour of the bus tunnel for a closer look at what's being upgraded. RIPTA said the bus tunnel, prior to its closure, was used by six RIPTA routes. The agency estimates that those routes made more than 250 trips each through the tunnel each day. "It took them 18 months to dig this tunnel from beginning to end," Plouffe said of the construction.

The bus tunnel hasn't changed much since it was first built, according to Plouffe, which is why it is in dire need of repairs. Plouffe said those repairs include improving the tunnel's drainage system, removing the graffiti, repaving the roadway and refurbishing the North Main Street bus shelter. RIPTA will also be installing new technology that will help bus drivers navigate the dark passageway, he added. "The bus drivers will come to the beginning of the tunnel, it's going to be brighter," Plouffe explained. "The middle of the tunnel will be darker, so their eyes will adjust, and then it will be lighter at the end of the tunnel." The last time the bus tunnel underwent renovations was back in fall 1991. It reopened less than a year later. Plouffe said the renovated bus tunnel will be worth the wait. "Any kind of safety upgrades we can possibly think of, those are going to be upgraded," he said.

Nevada: Reno Gets \$3.3 Million Boost from Federal Infrastructure Plan for Regional Bus System

Reno Gazette Journal (4/8, Robinson) reports that Reno got a boost of about \$3.3 million in federal funding for its bus system, the Federal Transit Administration announced Thursday. It's part of a \$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure plan President Joe Biden signed in 2021 that targets \$20.5 billion for public transportation. "We're making history's biggest-ever federal investment in transit — trains, buses, ferries and more — so people can reliably and affordably get to wherever they need to be," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg in a statement. Reno saw the biggest percentage increase of any community in the money it will receive based on statutory formulas and funding levels set by Congress that rely on new population and service data, the FTA said in a news release. "The main driver of the increase is our growing ridership — if we include March 2024, we are currently at 20 straight months of ridership growth," said Josh MacEachern of the Regional Transportation Commission of Washoe County. "This makes sense as Reno's population is continuing to grow while other cities across the country are seeing fairly flat or declining populations." MacEachern said the \$3.3 million in additional transit funds will go directly to RTC for use in Reno, Sparks and Washoe County. "The increase in FTA funding will go to capital purchases for the transit system in Washoe County — things like vehicles, facilities and shelters," he said.

Wisconsin: Connect One BRT Fare-Free Rides Come to an End: What Riders Need to Know

WTMJ (4/8, Mendez) reports that the Milwaukee County Transit System's (MCTS) Connect One BRT is a nine-mile route that runs along Wisconsin Avenue from the Regional Medical Center to downtown. According to MCTS, the ridership for CONNECT 1 makes it one of the

top 10 routes. The Connect ONE has been free for riders since it debuted in June of 2023, but soon they'll have to pay. The free fare is something that riders like Chauncey Robinson said have been a big help — Robinson takes the bus to work frequently to get to American Family Field. "It drops me off probably a half a mile before the stadium and I just walked the rest of the way there," said Robinson. Robinson says he actually prefers riding the Connect One because the experience has been pleasant. "It has more like a trolley type of field to it," he said. According to MCTS, riders will have to start paying before they board on April 15th. MCTS said there are three ways to do this: at the kiosk validator located at bus stop stations, using the Umo app, or your WisGo card. The fare will cost two dollars per trip and cap at four dollars daily. MCTS said when riders prepay before boarding, it speeds up the boarding process. MCTS officials said, during the first week of payment, ambassadors will be located at some of the Connect One stations to help riders through the payment process. Most riders say they were happy to enjoy the bus while it was free. "It's been excellent you know it's a nice comfortable ride. The bus is quite clean. They have new features as far as you can charge your phone," said rider Leon Hill.

New York: Six Labor Organizations Break with LIRR's Largest Union, File for Federal Mediation

Newsday (4/8, Castillo) reports that a recently settled contract that grants 3,200 Long Island Rail Road workers 9.5% in raises over three years has deepened divisions between the LIRR's largest union and the heads of several other unions holding out for more, according to labor leaders. At an impasse over a new deal, six labor organizations representing the majority of unionized railroad workers have broken with the LIRR's largest union, and have each filed for federal mediation, an early step in a lengthy process that, if unresolved, could culminate in a work stoppage at the largest commuter railroad in the United States. The agreement reached between the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail, and Transportation Workers (SMART) follows the terms set last June with the deal reached between the MTA and the Transport Workers Union Local 100, which represent New York City bus and subway employees. That three-year deal offered workers 3% raises in the first and second years, and a 3.5% raise in the third year. In November, SMART — which represents 3,200 LIRR workers ranging from train conductors to station cleaners to track workers — and the MTA quietly reached a deal with the same pattern as that of the TWU contract. Although the deal does not include any changes to work rules, both sides also agreed to "continue discussions on ... work-rule reform proposals" made by the LIRR, according to a memorandum of understanding obtained by Newsday.

Maryland: PACE Scholars Partner to Bring More Transportation to Salisbury

WMDT (4/8, Parker) reports that transportation is expanding here in Salisbury through Shore Up. Students at Salisbury University came up with a plan for easier access for underserved communities. "Everybody in the community, especially the marginalized community, the Hispanic community, and the Haitian community on the West side so they can have equitable transportation to go to work wherever they want to go," said Andersen Herman, a student organizer. PACE Scholars at Salisbury University conducted a study finding out that there was a need for more transportation. "While talking to some Haitian individuals, they

said they don't have transportation access to work," said Herman. And creating better access, the students along with the City of Salisbury and Shore Up came up with a plan: "To find out what the community actually needed the students was able to have feet on the ground throughout the community at the Third Friday events to find out what the residents wanted in the area and they found out that they wanted a bus stop at this location," said Jon Wilson, Transportation Project Manager for the City of Salisbury. The bus stop is on Cypress Street in front of the Save A Lot, a predominantly Haitian neighborhood. "So the bus stop is a way for them to have a transport to go to work and especially to the Haitian community because the language barrier can sometimes be a problem when it comes to "what do you need?" and then they don't understand because they don't speak English," said Stephora Cesar Alberi, a student organizer. The students hope this can build a bridge connecting Salisbury and marginalized communities. "We're expecting a huge impact in the community, so now people that have been affected on the West side with no bus stop were able to, they're able to get back to work and be able to get to work more safely through the bus stop," said LaMarre James, a student organizer.

Virginia: Work to Begin on Lewis Street Transit Hub Rehabilitation Project in Staunton

Staunton News Leader (4/8, Calello) reports that the BRITE transit bus stop at 240 N. Lewis Street, known as the Lewis Street Hub, will undergo a complete rehabilitation this spring, according to a press release from the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission (CSPDC). "This project is part of an ongoing commitment to make the community safer and more accessible through improved public transit options," said Ann Cundy, Executive Director for the CSPDC. The CSPDC, who operates the BRITE Bus Transit System, is leading the rehabilitation project. The completed project will include new pavement, updated passenger amenities, a dedicated bus lane and parking area, ADA-accessible sidewalks, curb ramps, safety lighting, installation of conduits for future Electric Vehicle (EV) charging stations and landscaping, the release said. Funded through a grant from the Federal Transit Administration and supported by the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, it will create a beautiful asset for the City of Staunton and the city's residents, said the CSPDC. The Lewis Street lot will close on April 15 and will be unavailable to buses and cars during the renovation. Construction activities for the rehabilitation project are expected to take approximately four months to complete, the release said. During construction, the Lewis Street Hub bus stop will temporarily shift to 19 angled parking spaces on North Augusta Street. Personal and business vehicle parking will not be available in these 19 angled parking spaces on North Augusta Street beginning at Academy Street toward Frederick Street. The remaining angled parking and parallel parking spots on the opposite side of North Augusta Street will still be available with no time limit, as well as on-street parking within a couple blocks of the temporary transfer center.

Michigan: Public Transit Expands in Oakland County

The Oakland Press (4/8, McNichol) reports that an empty bus does not mean that expanding public transit options in Oakland County are unused. "The first day of a new route, people aren't going to be queuing up. It's been 30 years and no one's seen a bus in that area," said Eli Cooper, the county's transit manager. A robust transit system serves three purposes: Supporting the country's drive toward sustainability; helping

people get to and from school and work; and supporting aging Baby Boomers' ability to make essential trips when they are no longer able to drive. Cooper said it takes a few years, especially in an autocentric community, for people to adopt a different mode of transit. "Ridership will grow and continue to grow." Growth was the goal after voters approved the 10-year, 0.95 countywide transit millage in 2022. Last year, the county and SMART signed a contract to provide SMART \$31.6 million per year to preserve services in place as of Dec. 31, 2022, and \$10.1 million to expand services.

In the county, SMART had 13,000 more passenger trips in the last quarter of 2023, compared to the same period a year earlier, credited in part to new routes in Novi and Wixom, according to Bernard Parker III, SMART's vice president of external affairs. Last year, demand-response rides rose 3% to 84,123 and use of the Flex service, which is on-demand travel, rose by 43% to 241,176. Cooper coordinates transit services provided by SMART and smaller regional services: Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART), People's Express (PEX), North Oakland Transportation Authority (NOTA), Western Oakland Transportation Authority (WOTA), and the former Older Persons Commission service, now called OPC Transportation (OPC).

Amy Grzymkowski, WOTA's deputy director, is already seeing increased ridership. "We had a little less than 9,000 riders in the first quarter of 2023," she said. "This year we had 17,200 riders in the first quarter of 2024. It's been a significant jump. Not quite double, but close." WOTA has twice as much ground to cover and will expand its service area later this year. Grzymkowski said new ridership is the result of expanding services from seniors and people with disabilities to the general population. "But the vast quantity of our riders remain seniors and adults with disabilities," she said, adding that the millage campaign raised awareness of public transit services and the successful millage vote led to more people using WOTA's door-to-door transportation. "It's been a fantastic growth. We weren't really surprised by that. We knew the need was there," she said.

North Carolina: Changes Coming to GoRaleigh Bus Routes

WNCN (4/8, Retana) reports that GoRaleigh is bringing back a bus route that previously ran through downtown while also planning on increasing frequency for other routes. The R-Line will be back in service beginning May 5. The Downtown route will run every 15 minutes. The route reaches destinations including the Convention Center, the Performing Arts Center, GoRaleigh Station, Raleigh Crossing, Raleigh Union Station, Red Hat Amphitheater, Seaboard Station, William Peace University, Smokey Hollow and the State Capital Building. GoRaleigh will also roll out additional service. One route will add all-day service and four routes will now be a part of the high frequency network, running every 15 minutes. The new additional service GoRaleigh will at double the miles of the current high frequency routes.

Rhode Island: RIPTA to Hold Public Hearings About Revised Proposed Service Changes

WJAR (4/8) reports that the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority announced it will be holding public hearings and a community meeting about the revised proposed service changes. The public hearing in Providence will be held on Monday afternoon. The public hearing in West Warwick will be next Monday and a community meeting in Pawtucket will be next Thursday. RIPTA announced its initial service change proposals in February as a

response to the driver shortage. The initial plan was to put the service changes into effect on April 6. In response to the starting driver wage increase, RIPTA said it postponed the service change and further evaluated routes to make necessary adjustments. The new proposed changes will minimize disruption for passengers but might result in reduced service levels, according to RIPTA.

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Maritime Administration

Red Sea: US Says It Destroyed Houthi Air Defense, Drone Systems in Red Sea Area

Reuters (4/8, Singh) reports late Monday that the U.S. military said on Monday it destroyed air defense and drone systems of Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi forces in the area of the Red Sea, with no injuries or damage reported to commercial, U.S. and coalition ships. The U.S. Central Command said on X its forces had destroyed an air defense system with two missiles ready to launch, a ground control station in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen and one unmanned aerial system launched by the Houthis from Yemen over the Red Sea.

California: How the Port of L.A. Transformed an Industrial Site into an Idyllic Waterfront Park

Fast Company (4/8, Berg) reports that in the shadow of towering cranes and hulking cargo ships, a unique new public park has just opened in Los Angeles. Located on the edge of the Port of L.A. complex, the largest and busiest port in North America, the new park is a rare piece of public space on a hard-working waterfront. Covering 10 acres, the park adds access and recreation to what was formerly off-limits industrial land, creating a boon for residents of the port-adjacent community of Wilmington. Sasaski, in partnership with the Port of L.A., designed Wilmington Waterfront Promenade as part of a broader master plan in the area to convert polluted brownfield sites into parks and public amenities. The waterfront park is a few blocks away from a 30-acre park and community center built along a corridor between the port and the residential area that sits on its edge. That park has become a new center for the community of Wilmington, which is home to the port and an active oil refinery, making it a pollution hotspot.

Demand Shocks Keeping Aging Fleets Afloat, Argue Shipowners

Freight Waves (4/8, Rudolph) reports that ship recycling has fallen to its lowest level in 20 years, per a recent report by the Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO). BIMCO — a trade group representing shipowners — states that capacity has been overtaxed by the Red Sea crisis, which has forced shipping lines to take a longer route around Africa's Cape of Good Hope. Prior to the emergence of this latest choke point, BIMCO points to the impact of Western sanctions on Russian oil and coal, which similarly stressed tanker and bulkier fleets, as well as the sudden surge of consumer demand for imported goods during the pandemic, which threw a wrench into the operations of container ships. This rapid succession of upheavals has led shipowners, BIMCO argues, to delay the recycling of their oldest vessels, especially as they await the delivery of newbuilds. "During the first quarter of 2024," the

report states, “only two million deadweight tons (DWT) ship capacity were recycled,” the ninth consecutive quarter in which recycled capacity was below 3 million DWT. BIMCO also notes that the last time recycling activity was this low over an extended period was in the run-up to the 2008 financial crisis. But since fleets are far larger now than they were then, the relative dearth of recycling has had an outsize effect.

Haiti: Haitian Police Seize Hijacked Cargo Ship After 5-Hour Shootout

NBC (4/8, Garcia) reports that Haiti’s National Police agency says that it has recovered a hijacked cargo ship laden with rice following a gunbattle with gangs that lasted more than five hours. Two police officers were injured and an undetermined number of gang members were killed in the shootout that occurred Saturday off the coast of the capital, Port-au-Prince, authorities said in a statement. It was a rare victory for an underfunded police department that has struggled to quell gang violence following a spate of attacks that began Feb. 29.

Police said in the statement Sunday that those responsible for the hijacking were members of two gangs, named the 5 Seconds and the Taliban gang. They said gunmen seized the transport ship Magalie on Thursday as it departed the port of Varreux. Radio Télé Métropole reported that the gangs kidnapped everyone aboard the ship and stole some 10,000 sacks of rice out of the 60,000 sacks it was carrying. The ship was headed to the northern coastal city of Cap-Haitien.

California Unveils \$4.6B Transmission Plan for Offshore Wind

E&E News (4/8, Richards) reports that California’s main grid operator wants to spend more than \$4.5 billion to upgrade the state’s transmission system for offshore wind, underscoring a nationwide shift toward major investments in grid expansion. The California Independent System Operator released a \$6.1 billion draft plan last week to prep the Golden State’s power system for clean energy. The largest tranche of funding — \$4.59 billion — would be devoted to wires and infrastructure that would carry offshore wind power from the state’s isolated northern coast toward hubs of demand like San Francisco. The plan also includes 19 proposed transmission projects to boost reliability as electrification and electric vehicle use increases, at a cost of \$1.54 billion. The California ISO said the plan would meet a “rapid escalation” in renewable power as the state works to build a carbon-neutral grid by 2045. To meet the state’s decarbonization goals, state utility regulators say 85 gigawatts of renewable energy likely needs to come online by 2035.

“Major transmission upgrades are complex and require a significant upfront investment,” Neil Millar, California ISO’s vice president for infrastructure and operations planning, said in a statement. “It’s crucial that we do all we can to synchronize all of our planning and resource procurement so we can get these transmission lines planned.” The multibillion-dollar plan faces several weeks of vetting and public review before an expected final decision in May. The California ISO estimates it would cost customers 0.5 cents per kilowatt-hour over the lifetime of the projects. Two of the Northern California projects would be open to competitive bidding. The plan mirrors an attempt nationwide to more than double the country’s decades-old network of power lines to support cleaner sources of energy than fossil-fueled power plants — and to meet President Joe Biden’s goal of achieving a carbon-free grid by 2035.

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National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

California: Tesla Heads to Court After Apple Engineer's Family Says Autopilot Caused His Fatal Crash

Washington Post (4/8, Thadani) reports that Tesla has settled a long-running lawsuit over the 2018 death of a former Apple engineer whose vehicle veered off a highway in Northern California, court documents say, avoiding a lengthy jury trial over what role its driver-assistance technology may have played in the crash. Details of the settlement, which were released in a court filing Monday, the day before the trial was set to begin, were not disclosed. The case was one of several set for trial this year in which Tesla's Autopilot technology is alleged to have contributed to a fatal crash. It appears to be one of Tesla's first settlements for such a case, a notable moment for a company whose CEO, Elon Musk, had vowed in a 2022 social media post that his company would not settle an "unjust case against us, even if we will probably lose." The case involved a fatal crash in March 2018, when a Tesla in Autopilot careened into a highway barrier near Mountain View, Calif., after getting confused by what the company's lawyers described in court documents as a "faded and nearly obliterated" lane line. Walter Huang, a father of two and an Apple engineer on his morning commute, was allegedly playing a game on his phone while his Tesla steered itself down U.S. Route 101. Documents filed in the case show that Huang's vehicle on Autopilot drifted from the "faded" lane line, then began following a clearer one to the left, which put him in the path of a highway safety barrier separating the 101 from an exit to State Route 85 while going 71 mph.

The settlement is a surprising twist in the high-profile case, which Tesla has been fighting since Huang's family sued in April 2019. In its defense for this case — as well as for other lawsuits headed to trial this year — Tesla argues that it was not liable, because it warns drivers that they are ultimately in control of the vehicle while in Autopilot. Ed Walters, who teaches autonomous vehicle law at Georgetown Law, said he is surprised that Tesla decided to settle, because the facts of Huang's crash seemed "favorable" for Tesla. Because the Huang case echoes multiple other lawsuits scheduled for trial, many observers were watching this case closely for its potential to set a precedent for the future proceedings. The outcomes of these trials are critical for the company's future and for Musk, who has said that Tesla is "worth basically zero" if it cannot make its cars self-driving. Tesla has so far prevailed: A jury found the company not liable in a case last year over the alleged role of its Autopilot technology in a 2019 crash in Riverside County, Calif. Walters said settlements are a good way for the company to "manage risk," as jury trials can yield "highly unpredictable results." The trial was expected to last several weeks, according to the family's lawyers. "This might be a sign that Tesla is taking a stronger settlement posture for early cases, waiting to litigate until its software is more advanced," he said. But he added that he is "surprised this case settled. I thought Tesla would want to litigate on these facts." Wall Street Journal (4/8, Felton, Elliott), Reuters (4/8), Bloomberg (4/8, Graf, Hull), CNN (4/8, Goldman), Business Insider (4/8, Musumeci, Kay) and San Francisco Chronicle (4/8, Parker) provide additional coverage.

Politico: What a Driverless Future Might Look Like

Politico (4/8, Robertson) reports that autonomous vehicles, at long last, seem to be winning the hearts and minds of their curious (or brave) passengers. “SF’s hottest club is a Waymo,” posted one digital artist on X, summing up the mostly warm reviews the self-driving car company has received after it rolled out its commercial taxi service in August 2023. Despite ongoing concerns over safety and job losses, AVs have arrived as a part of everyday life for some Americans: The San Francisco Chronicle reported 191,000 driverless rides between September and November of last year, and Waymo vehicles have driven more than 5 million miles in Arizona. What does that mean for the United States, arguably the most auto-centric nation in the world? A new report commissioned by the tech industry trade group Chamber of Progress, and shared exclusively with Digital Future Daily, attempts to answer that question as AV companies push to roll out their vehicles across the country.

“Once this technology actually becomes available to the public, it’s popular,” Adam Kovacevich, founder and CEO of the Chamber of Progress, told me. Kovacevich argued that the spread of AVs is inevitable, and that by restricting their use due to safety or labor concerns the U.S. risks lagging China, which has enthusiastically adopted the technology. Critics of the technology say it will violently disrupt the economy for gains that will accrete largely to the tech industry, with one Teamster in Indiana protesting in a legislative hearing that it “wouldn’t just be bad for professional drivers,” but it would also create “a ripple effect throughout the economy, negatively affecting the finances of both private and public sector entities” in his state.

Researchers commissioned by the Chamber of Progress project three potential scenarios for U.S. adoption of AVs: a cautious and conservative approach to the technology; a “moderate” approach; and full speed ahead (no pun intended). In the moderate scenario, they expect nearly 9 million AVs on the roads over the next 15 years; the creation of 114,000 jobs in the design, maintenance, and logistics sectors; and that those jobs will largely pay more than the U.S. median wage of \$44,520, with states that have strong STEM and auto industries reaping most of the benefits. One major obstacle to AV development is regulation. The auto industry is one of America’s most heavily regulated, and organized labor has applied considerable pressure to restrict or slow down driverless cars. In its report, the Chamber of Progress urges “a supportive federal regulatory environment” that might organize the current “patchwork approach” the group says is hampering the technology’s growth.

Arizona: GM’s Cruise to Resume Testing Its Robotaxi Service in Phoenix

Bloomberg (4/9, Love, Welch) reports that General Motors Co.’s Cruise autonomous driving business is preparing to resume testing its robotaxis with safety drivers in Phoenix, marking an important step in its attempts to resume service after grounding its fleet last year. The company is set to announce and begin the testing as early as Tuesday, according to two people with knowledge of the matter.

In recent months, Cruise has been in talks with officials in 20 metropolitan areas where it previously ran cars or had started mapping in preparation to run them. Phoenix is a natural place to start as Cruise already has vehicles in the area and city officials were open to the idea of its return, said one of the people, who asked not to be named as the plan isn’t public.

Safety Agency Urges Drivers to Focus on Road, Not Eclipse

The Hill (4/8, Crisp) reports that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is urging motorists to be careful if they have to drive during Monday's eclipse. "Other drivers may be clogging the roads," the agency said in a post Sunday on X, formerly Twitter. "Drive slower to keep safe and stay alert." NHTSA also recommended that drivers pull over to a safe area, like a parking lot, if they want to watch the eclipse, instead of the side of the road. "Don't expect sunglasses to protect from harmful effects," it added. The total solar eclipse will cross the U.S. on Monday afternoon, offering a rare moment for the moon to completely cover the sun. Millions of people across 13 states, mostly in the middle of the country and the eastern coastline, will be in the path of totality for the celestial phenomena, while others will experience a partial eclipse. Prices for lodging across the eclipse path have surged because of the influx of travelers in the path of totality, another signal of potential roadway issues. "In addition to your cool safety glasses, remember these travel safety tips," NHTSA said in a Monday post on X. "Stay focused on the road and not your surroundings," it recommended. The post prompted some online to urge people to walk and avoid driving at all during the eclipse.

NHTSA Probes Honda's Handling of 2023 Accord, HR-V Recalls

Automotive News (4/8, Weykamp) reports that U.S. auto safety regulators are investigating Honda Motor Co.'s handling of a recall from November involving seat belt restraining issues in new car models. American Honda recalled more than 300,000 2023-24 Accord and HR-V vehicles in November for a missing rivet in the front seat belt pretensioners. The missing rivet might fail to restrain an occupant in the event of a crash, increasing the likelihood of injury. NHTSA's Office of Defects Investigation said it opened the investigation — known as a recall query — on April 4 to evaluate the defect assessment, scope and inspection procedure of the 2023 recall. Dealers were expected to inspect both front seat belts and replace them as necessary as part of the original recall remedy. Joyson Safety Systems makes the front seat belt pretensioner assembly, according to a recall report submitted Nov. 21 to NHTSA. There have been no crashes or injuries related to the issue, NHTSA said. "Honda has already been in communication with the agency on this topic and will continue to cooperate with the NHTSA through the query process," a Honda spokesperson said in a statement to Automotive News on Monday.

Florida: Gov. DeSantis Is Declaring the Month of April as Hot Car Death Prevention Month

WFSU (4/8, Andrews) reports that the month of April is officially being recognized as 'Hot Car Death Prevention Month' in Florida. That's under a bill, HB 591, signed by Gov. Ron DeSantis on Friday in an effort to raise awareness about the dangers of leaving kids behind in cars. "Awareness will really save lives, not just from leaving kids in hot cars but understanding the dangers of leaving that car unlock in the middle of July in Florida," said House Representative Michelle Salzman, R-Pensacola, one of the many lawmakers who supported the measure. Under the legislation, state and local leaders will partnering up in a statewide initiative to educate the public about the dangers and penalties associated with leaving kids unattended in cars.

New York: Nearly 36,000 NYS Driver's Licenses Suspended for Failing

to Take Eye Test

Newsday (4/8, Gromley) reports that one of the last vestiges of temporary measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic has left 35,833 drivers with suspended licenses because they didn't pass a simple eye test, according to the state Department of Motor Vehicles. These drivers can still take and pass vision tests through the DMV or through an optometrist to lift the suspension. But after nearly two years of urging these drivers to comply in emails, letters and website alerts, the state has little else it can do, said state Department of Motor Vehicles spokesman Walt McClure. The state DMV can't take any other action to get these drivers' vision tested, such as denying a vehicle registration or other motor vehicle service. That leaves enforcement to use police stops if drivers drive with suspended licenses. A conviction of driving on a suspended license can result in a \$500 fine plus other fees and a 30-day jail sentence or probation. The charges could rise to a misdemeanor or felony if a driver with a suspended license is also charged with crimes such as driving while intoxicated. "It is central to what we do at DMV to ensure that New York's roads are safe for all drivers, which means that people have to show that they have an appropriate level of visual acuity to be able to operate a motor vehicle," McClure said. "It is also key to ensuring safety that drivers be properly licensed." Research has long backed up the urgency of passing vision tests as a prerequisite for driving. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration notes drivers must constantly and accurately scan the road ahead, behind and beside them; frequently switch lanes and avoid hazards, often with little distance to do so. Poor vision not corrected by lenses can make it difficult to keep to a safe path on a curve and lead to slower deceleration to avoid a crash or a stop light or sign, the studies show.

Alabama: USA Students Partner with City of Mobile to Host Road Safety Event

WPMI (4/8, Lane) reports that Road Safety Advocates from the University of South Alabama are partnering with the City of Mobile to help warn college students about the dangers of drinking and driving. Working with the City of Mobile's Public Safety Department, the student-led organization will host a mock car crash on campus at the Marx Library Pavilion on Friday, April 12, at 12:30 p.m. Attendees will get an up-close look at the disastrous consequences of drinking and driving. "Drunken driving can end lives in a matter of seconds," Alexis Hatton, one of the road safety advocates, said. "We are using this event to inform fellow students how driving impaired can be deadly or result in an accident with serious injuries to themselves and others." According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, one person dies every 39 minutes in a car crash resulting from alcohol-impaired driving. Even a small amount of alcohol can affect driving ability, and an alcohol-related accident can have life-altering consequences. "When you consider how valuable life is, drinking while under the influence is not worth it," Christian Harris, another road safety advocate, said. WKRG (4/8, O'Donnell) provides additional coverage.

Wisconsin: Share The Road, as Farm Vehicle Safety in Spotlight

WISC (4/8, Millman) reports that with farms ramping back up to full production, the Wisconsin State Patrol reminds drivers and farm vehicle operators to be safe, patient and share the road. According to the WSP in a statement Monday, there have been more than 2,000 crashes involving farm vehicles in Wisconsin in the past five years, including a

preliminary report of 388 in 2023.

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Pipeline & Hazardous Materials Safety Administration

Texas, Louisiana: Energy Transfer Files for Regulator Review in Pipeline Dispute

Bloomberg (4/8, Elkin) reports that Energy Transfer LP is asking the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to take a closer look at a Williams Cos Inc. pipeline project as a legal battle rages between the two companies. Energy Transfer said in a FERC filing that Williams is constructing interstate transmission pipeline facilities in Texas and Louisiana without first seeking necessary approval. The filing also asks FERC to clarify how it applies tests to determine whether a facility needs a public-interest period and a review under the National Environmental Policy Act. Multiple developers are sparring with Energy Transfer, saying the pipeline heavyweight is blocking them from building new projects by not allowing them to cross over its existing conduits. Energy Transfer has said that the companies are asking for an unreasonable number of crossings and failing to go through proper regulatory review. "Every gas infrastructure developer should play by the same rules — whether that developer is Williams, Energy Transfer or anyone else," Energy Transfer said in the filing. Williams did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Louisiana: Gulf of Mexico Pipeline Repaired After Mystery Oil Spill Off Louisiana

gCaptain (4/8, Schuler) reports that Unified Command has successfully completed an integrity test on the Main Pass Oil Gathering (MPOG) company's pipeline system, located southeast of New Orleans in Plaquemines Parish. This procedure was carried out in response to an oil release that was first detected on November 16, 2023. The integrity test revealed a failed subsea connector on the MPOG line that did not maintain pressure.

It is still undetermined whether this connector was associated with the November oil release, and additional potential sources are being investigated. The exact quantity of the oil discharge is unknown. However, initial projections suggest that roughly 1.1 million gallons of crude oil could have been released from the 67-mile long pipeline, which was subsequently was closed by MPOG. Working with the Unified Command, MPOG developed and executed a plan to safely remove and replace the spool piece — the part of the pipeline that included the failed connector. The operation prioritized safety and environmental protection. The spool piece was successfully replaced on February 21.

After the replacement, MPOG performed another integrity test on a majority of the pipeline. The pipeline was pressurized in stages using an inert gas to ensure the system could maintain containment. The test concluded on Friday, revealing no additional pipeline segments that require further assessment.

New York: Pipeline Tests New York Climate Law

A newsletter from Politico (4/8, Rivard, French) reports that the planned expansion of capacity for the Iroquois Pipeline that carries natural gas into New York City would impact disadvantaged communities, but the company has argued a not-yet-final state policy shouldn't apply to the project. The Enhancement by Compression, or ExC, project involves additional horsepower for compressor stations in Athens and Dover. That requires air permits from the Department of Environmental Conservation, which is still reviewing the projects. In a test of the state's climate law, the Athens compressor station is located in an area defined by New York as a "disadvantaged community," or DAC. The Dover station is adjacent to a DAC. That triggers additional scrutiny under the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, which requires agencies to avoid disproportionate burdens on DACs. DEC officials indicated to Iroquois that they planned to apply elements of the commissioner's draft policy to implement that requirement to the project, according to emails obtained by Politico through a public records request.

North Dakota: Public Hearings to Focus on Proposed 320-Mile Carbon Dioxide Pipeline

KI YR (4/8, Gray) reports that the Public Service scheduled three public hearings on a proposed carbon dioxide pipeline. The pipeline is being proposed by Summit Carbon Solutions and would run roughly 320 miles through 10 counties across south-central to southeast North Dakota. The project is expected to cost nearly \$900 million and will also include the construction of pump stations, mainline valves and access roads.

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Electric Vehicles

More in US Say They Wouldn't Consider Buying EV: Gallup

The Hill (4/8, Sforza) reports that more Americans said in 2024 that they would not consider purchasing an electric vehicle (EV) than in 2023, a new Gallup poll found. The poll found that 48 percent of respondents said they would not consider buying an electric vehicle — up 7 percentage points than those who said the same in 2023. Thirty-five percent said in the latest survey they might consider purchasing one, and 9 percent said they were seriously considering it. The new poll also found that the percentage of Americans who said they owned an EV ticked up slightly in 2024, with 7 percent saying they have one. Last year, 4 percent said they owned an EV. Democrats surveyed by Gallup are more likely to say they are considering buying an EV, with 15 percent saying they are considering buying one and 46 percent saying they may consider one. Nine percent said they already own an EV, while 27 percent said they would not consider buying one. Republicans are much more likely to oppose buying an EV, with 69 percent saying they would not buy one. Twenty-two percent said they may consider purchasing one, but just 2 percent said they are seriously considering it. The poll was conducted March 1-20 among 1,016 adults and has a margin of error of 4 percentage points. Fox News (4/8, Catenacci), Washington Examiner (4/8, Birle) and Washington Times (4/8, Salai) provide additional coverage.

New York Times, Opinion: Sometimes, to Make an Electric Car

Better, You've Got to Make It a Little Worse

An opinion piece in New York Times (4/8, Dyer) argues that we're at an inflection point in electric-car optimism. Over the past few years, as electric vehicle sales increased substantially and car companies announced an onslaught of new battery-powered models, it seemed that electric cars were a near-term inevitability. But for all the heady promise, E.V. enthusiasm seems to be cooling. Ford recently announced that it's cutting production targets for the Lightning, its electric truck. Brag-and-bluster Tesla projected that sales growth in 2024 would be "notably lower" than in recent years. Hertz is selling off about a third of its electric cars and Audi is slowing its transition to E.V.s. There are plenty of obvious headwinds for E.V.s — cost, range, and charging infrastructure (or lack thereof). But there's also a more subtle issue at play, one that won't be easily resolved: Electric cars are too boring. I know this seems like a preposterous complaint, and I agree. On the list of things wrong with the world, "electric cars are dull" isn't in the Top 5. I revel in being able to charge my plug-in hybrid Chrysler Pacifica with my solar panels, and believe that E.V.s are the answer to humanity's long-term transportation needs. However, I also believe that the anesthetic experience of driving an electric car is a real hurdle to the technology's widespread adoption, given that nearly every potential E.V. buyer grew up with the rich sensory experience of internal combustion.

Washington Post, Opinion: We Built 7 EV Chargers in 2 Years. That's Actually Not the Problem.

An opinion piece in Washington Post (4/8, Bai) argues that a little more than two years ago, as part of his landmark \$1 trillion infrastructure law, President Biden announced the planned construction of half a million charging stations for electric vehicles by 2030. As of this week, according to a Post report from Shannon Osaka, the program had completed exactly seven stations — room for 38 cars, if we're feeling generous. The problem here isn't really the pace of the rollout, which, yes, makes your average kitchen remodeler look like a wizard of efficiency, but which is pretty typical for massive public projects. No, the problem lies in the way the Democrats habitually mislead the public on the near-term impact of public investment — and usually end up paying the price. I happen to believe the charger program makes a ton of sense. It has always been government's job to underwrite huge shifts in the infrastructure we use — railroads, highways, public schools. And we're never going to get people past their anxiety over electric cars until they know they can take a road trip without having to study a map of charging stations like Napoleon readying for battle. But here's what infrastructure investments won't do. They won't create a ton of jobs, no matter what anybody tells you, because we build infrastructure in the same way we build everything else now — with way more machines than people. And they won't transform the country during any one administration (or even two), because it takes forever to coordinate all the federal and state agencies required just to get things off the ground.

Opinion: Finding a Path Forward for Mainstream Acceptance of EVs

An opinion piece from Automotive News (4/8, Tobin) argues that the transition to electric vehicles has become a subject of polarizing and often irrational debate. While some tout EVs as the ultimate mobility fix, others revel in the challenges faced by early adopters. However, neither extreme stance is conducive to a successful transition to electrification. Merely

demanding the production of EVs and invoking government-mandated customer adoption is bound to fail. Even in the event of a massively successful EV transition, traditional carbon fuels will still be in demand, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach to energy overall. The problem can be likened to a stool, with each leg representing a critical element that must be addressed both individually and as part of the bigger picture.

Ethanol Industry on EVs - The Infrastructure Isn't There and Consumers Aren't All in

RFD TV (4/8, McCullough) reports that the ethanol industry is raising concerns over the Biden Administration's adamant approach for an all-electric vehicle fleet, saying it is on a collision course with reality. As policymakers and industry leaders navigate this shifting landscape, voices from the Renewable Fuels Association offer insights into the complexities ahead, saying at some point, tax policies, infrastructure shortcomings, and tough new auto emission standards, to force a switch to all EVs, will hit a roadblock. "The infrastructure's not there, and the consumers, there's been a definite pullback from a consumer perspective, on the purchasing electric, especially all-battery electric vehicles," said Troy Bredenkamp. Despite these challenges, Bredenkamp sees opportunities in combining technologies, particularly through plug-in hybrid vehicles. "I think at some point they're going to have a realization that the 'sweet point' here is a plug-in hybrid concept. And that's where we want to make sure that those plug-in hybrids turn into flex fuel vehicle plug-in hybrids because we think that would be the best of both worlds." However, he also raises a cautionary note regarding the push for a total end to fossil fuels. He warns against potential "regulatory whiplash" in the event of political transitions and stresses the importance of gradual, balanced approaches to environmental policy.

Biden Electric Vehicle Fuel Rule Draws Challenge From 13 States

Bloomberg (4/8, Greene) reports that multiple states sued the Energy Department and the Environmental Protection Agency, challenging a rule that revises how the petroleum-equivalent fuel economy of electric vehicles is calculated. The petroleum-equivalency factor is used by the EPA to calculate light-duty vehicle manufacturers' compliance with the Transportation Department's Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards, which are intended to reduce energy consumption. The final rule, which was published by the Energy Department on March 29, exceeds the agency's statutory authority, the states and the American Free Enterprise Chamber of Commerce told the US Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit on April 5. They are asking the court to vacate the rule. Specifically, DOE doesn't have the authority to "impose a fuel-content factor which multiplies the nominal fuel-efficiency of electric automobiles," the petitioners said. They also claimed that DOE failed to complete an environmental impact statement under the National Environmental Policy Act.

Opinion: EVs Amount to a Gov't Wealth Transfer You Pay for

An opinion piece in Newsmax (4/8, Bell) argues that plug-in electric vehicles (EVs) are great so long as generous taxpayers can afford to buy them for us and we don't plan long winter trips to visit wayward brother Bubba who barely eeks out enough poultry chicken feed to sell inflationary \$11 sandwiches to other country rubes at his local bar and grill. According to an October 2023 Texas Public Policy Foundation report, "Overcharged Expectations: Unmasking True Costs of Electric Vehicles," as much as \$48,000 of the real cost of an average U.S. 2021

model year EV over a 10-year period will be paid through \$22 billion in socialized government charities. Included are subsidies in the form of tax benefits for purchasers, fuel economy credits for manufacturers, forced premiums for buying otherwise far less expensive petroleum models, and higher consumer electricity charges needed to support them. The TPPF study notes that these extra costs don't account for additional prices the industry must charge for more popular internal combustion vehicles as manufacturers are required to build fewer of them, amounting to a government-coerced wealth transfer from affluent EV owners paid by those who don't want — or can't afford — to buy them.

Pennsylvania: House Committee to Consider Bill Setting Electric Vehicle Fee to Start at \$125

PennLive (4/8, Murphy) reports that Pennsylvania's electric vehicle owners would pay an annual fee to help make up for lost gas tax revenue that goes toward maintaining the state's roads and bridges under a bill to receive consideration by a legislative committee Monday. The legislation, sponsored by the House Transportation Committee Chairman Ed Neilson, D-Philadelphia, would establish the annual fee starting at \$125 next year and increasing by \$25 a year through 2029 when it reaches \$225. In 2030 and thereafter, the annual fee would be adjusted annually at the rate of inflation. It also would repeal the alternative fuels tax on electricity for residential charging that battery-powered vehicle owners are supposed to pay but few do. The number of Pennsylvania electric vehicles according to PennDOT numbered 63,247 as of Jan. 31. Neilson's bill is the second electric vehicle fee proposal the House committee has considered during the 2023-24 legislative session. In December, it voted 22-3 to send a Senate-passed bill that would have set the annual fee at \$290. That would be among the highest of any state that has an electric vehicle fee. Neilson voted in favor of that bill despite considering the \$290 rate to be unreasonable. He said it was his intention to offer an amendment to lower the fee if the bill reached the House floor. "Many felt that if we gradually increase the fee individuals will be more open to pay," he said. "We brought multiple groups and stakeholders together for months on end, while not all agreed with my version, it was negotiated. To say my way or no way is not acceptable in any format."

Illinois: Rivian Hosts R2 Open House in Normal, Its New Production Home

Chicago Tribune (4/8, Channick) reports that nearly five years after unveiling its prototype electric pickup truck and SUV for a Normal community looking to restart its idled auto plant, Rivian was back in the town circle Saturday with its second-generation EVs, and the promise of more activity at the now-bustling factory. The low-key but festive event showcased the midsize R2 SUV, which will be built in Normal after Rivian delayed plans for a second plant in Georgia. The smaller and sportier R3 crossover, whose production plans have yet to be announced, was also on display. Rivian revealed both new models last month, while announcing that the R2, at least initially, will be made in Illinois. The company received more than 68,000 preorders for the \$45,000 R2 within 24 hours of its online debut. "It not only allows us to save a lot of capital, it allows us to launch the vehicle sooner," said Rivian CEO and founder R.J. Scaringe at Saturday's event. "And based on the reaction to the product, it's important we launch this as quickly as possible."

Hundreds of people arrived Saturday on a cool but sunny spring morning, where

prototypes of the R2, R3 and R3X were swarmed by a tire-kicking, photo-snapping crowd of EV enthusiasts and Rivian boosters, of which there are many in Normal. Rivian builds its inaugural full-size electric R1T pickup truck, R1S SUV and commercial delivery vans for Amazon and AT&T in a renovated 4 million-square-foot auto plant on the outskirts of the college town about 130 miles south of Chicago. The plant employs 7,000 assembly workers, up from zero after Mitsubishi closed the factory nearly a decade ago. Scaringe purchased the shuttered factory for \$16 million from a liquidation firm in January 2017. Boosted by more than \$1 billion in investment and expansion, the plant has built more than 100,000 EVs since restarting production in 2021. Rivian is expected to save more than \$2.25 billion in capital expense by launching production of the R2 alongside the rest of its lineup in Normal and putting plans to build the \$5 billion Georgia plant on hold, Scaringe said.

North Carolina: Businesses Invited to Apply to NCDOT for Federal Funded EV Charger Proposals

WFCT (4/8) reports that the N.C. Department of Transportation is inviting firms to apply for federal funds to build electric vehicle charging stations alongside highways and interstates. The state got \$109 million in National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Program funds to build infrastructure along several roads and communities approved by the program. "This is an important step to advance the clean energy economy and meet the demands that come with these once-in-lifetime changes we're seeing across transportation," Governor Roy Cooper said in a press release. "Getting charging infrastructure built throughout North Carolina will create good-paying jobs, help reduce harmful emissions and help North Carolinians take full advantage of the transition to clean transportation." Firms can apply until June 10 for program funding in the first phase of the project. This request for proposals will cover 11 EV charging stations to fill gaps in coverage along I-40, U.S. 17, I-77 and other major thoroughfares. The NCDOT plans to later issue more requests for proposals to cover another 28 stations along the alternative fuel corridor. "NEVI requires EV charging stations in the first phase to be installed every 50 miles along the federally approved alternative fuel corridors, and that they be within a mile of the corridor. Stations along the corridor will include four combined charging ports and all will be fast-chargers capable of charging a vehicle in about 20 minutes. NEVI funds are to be used to reimburse businesses for project costs, including procurement, installation and operation of the EV charging stations," a NCDOT press release states. WWAY (4/8) provides additional coverage.

Arkansas: ArDOT Awards Nearly \$15M for New EV Charging Stations

TB&P (4/8, della Rosa) reports that the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ArDOT) will provide \$14.91 million to build 19 electric vehicle charging stations along Arkansas highways and interstates. The money comes from the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act or Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. In February 2022, the U.S. Departments of Transportation and Energy released plans to use nearly \$5 billion made available by the law to build a national electric vehicle charging network by 2030. Arkansas will receive up to \$54.12 million over five years for its network. The federal infrastructure law established the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) Formula Program to help states build a network of 500,000 charging stations along alternative fuel corridors, primarily interstates. According to Arkansas' charging infrastructure plan, it would need to build 15 charging stations to meet the minimum requirements for the NEVI program. It requires a public

station every 50 miles along alternative fuel corridors. Arkansas has five existing charging stations that meet the NEVI program requirements and 34 stations that were identified as upgradable to meet the requirements. ArDOT received 120 proposals in response to the 2023 request for proposals for the NEVI money. All but one of the proposed electric vehicle charging stations will be built along interstates. Most charging stations will be built at truck stops and convenience stores. However, some will be built at hotels and restaurants.

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