

Algorand and BridgeTower Capital announce strategic partnership

BridgeTower Capital, a global private equity firm, focusing on traditional private equity investments and blockchain and DeFi markets, announced today a partnership with Algorand. Algorand, the creator of the world's first pure proof-of-stake foundational blockchain, is a leading blockchain technology company accelerating the convergence of decentralized and traditional finance.

BridgeTower will use Algorand's technology as the underlying blockchain solution to issuance of the BridgeTower Capital tokenized digital security. It will also use Al-

gorand as a preferred blockchain for BridgeTower products and services. Beyond the elementary requirement of an open, public network, Algorand's technology enables a set of high performing Layer-1 blockchains that provide security, scalability, complete transaction finality, built in privacy, Co-Chains, and advanced smart contracts.

"Algorand was a clear choice given their technology, team and leadership position in the digital marketplace," said BridgeTower Chief Executive Officer Cory Pugh. "It is another important piece falling

into place our effort to bring a new-world vision to private equity to maximizing the growing opportunities in blockchain and DeFi in private equity. It's gratifying to see it coming together and to now see others enthusiastically validating the vision."

BridgeTower is bringing a traditional operational business approach to its decentralized finance business by building recurring revenue and EBITDA growth as well as providing funding to growth companies with to create increased valuations. BridgeTower's current blockchain

staking product has grown substantially to more than \$60 million assets under delegation within two months of launch. BridgeTower will aggressively add self-hosted Nodes over the coming months. "Algorand's partnership with BridgeTower is based on our aligned vision to provide access to decentralized assets and products as well as a shared focus to expand opportunities in financial services through advanced blockchain technology," said David Markley, Business Solutions at Algorand. "We are excited BridgeTower will

be leveraging Algorand to allow investors to become shareholders in their tokenized private equity firm and admire their leadership in tokenized security offerings."

Today, nearly 1 million transactions per day are posted on Algorand's blockchain. In addition, over 4.5 million assets have been issued on chain and more than 500 companies are currently developing applications on Algorand, taking advantage of the unique layer-1 smart contracts and the other functionalities enriching the platform. (Agencies)

New Treasury office to oversee billions in virus relief package

Aid includes \$1400 for individuals

WASHINGTON, April 18, (AP) — The Treasury Department has created a new office to supervise the disbursement of the billions of dollars in relief money authorized by Congress to combat the coronavirus-related recession.

Officials said Wednesday that the goal is to streamline the process and ensure all eligible groups have access to the aid.

The Office of Recovery Programs will oversee the release of \$420 billion in support from the \$1.9 trillion package that President Joe Biden pushed through Congress last month, the Treasury said. That package included payments of up to \$1,400 for individuals, extended emergency unemployment benefits, rental assistance, support for small businesses and state and local governments.

The new office will also be responsible for supervising programs under the control of Treasury that were approved by Congress last year. In all, Congress has approved around \$5 trillion in assistance to help millions of people who lost their jobs, and also businesses that were forced to close due to the pandemic.

Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said the goal of the new office was to "get relief distributed quickly and into the hands of those who need it most."

In a separate report Wednesday, Treasury said that another 2 million relief payments with a value of more than \$3.4 billion have been disbursed over the past week.

That brings the total payments made since March 12 to 159 million with a value of more than \$376 billion. These individual payments total up to \$1,400 per person, with the large bulk of the money coming in the form of direct bank deposits made by the IRS.

The new Treasury office will be led by Jacob Leibenluft, who was designated as Treasury's chief re-

NEW YORK, April 18, (AP) — After a union battle at an Alabama warehouse, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos said that as executive chairman he will focus on making the company a better place to work.

Bezos made the disclosure Thursday in his annual letter to shareholders. He said he didn't take comfort in the outcome of the recent union election in Bessemer, Alabama, even though workers there overwhelmingly rejected a union.

"I think we need to do a better job for our employees," said Bezos, who will be stepping down as CEO later this year and will be executive chair of the online shopping giant.

Part of his focus as chair will be to make warehouse jobs safer. He said about 40% of injuries are sprains and strains caused by repeating the same motions and are more likely to happen during a worker's first six months in the job. He said training may help those "working in a physical role for the first time."

Last week, workers in Alabama handed the online retail giant a decisive victory when they voted against forming a union and cut off a path that labor activists had hoped would

lead to similar efforts throughout the company. The union push was the biggest in Amazon's 26-year history and only the second time that an organizing effort from within the company had come to a vote. But Bessemer was always viewed as a long shot since it pitted the country's second-largest employer against warehouse workers in a state with laws that don't favor unions. Alabama is one of 27 "right-to-work" states where workers don't have to pay dues to unions that represent them.

office will oversee a number of relief programs dealing with such areas as state and local government support, emergency rental assistance, support for homeowners to meet mortgage payments, support

Focus on making jobs safer

After 'union fight', Jeff Bezos to focus on Amazon workers



In this file photo, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos speaks during his news conference at the National Press Club in Washington. After a union battle at an Alabama warehouse, Bezos vowed to focus on making Amazon a better and safer place to work. (AP)

lead to similar efforts throughout the company.

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However, some of the work practices claimed by those seeking a union were unseemly and Bezos defended the company against the worst of those allegations.

"If you read some of the news reports, you might think we have no care for employees. In those reports, our employees are sometimes accused of being desperate souls and treated as robots," Bezos wrote.

"That's not accurate. They're sophisticated and thoughtful people who have options for where to work."

Those seeking more information can email OfficeOfRecoveryPrograms@treasury.gov.

GM to invest \$2.3 bln in Tennessee battery plant

NASHVILLE, Tenn., April 18, (AP) — General Motors and LG Energy Solution on Friday announced plans to invest more than \$2.3 billion to build a second U.S. electric vehicle battery factory in Spring Hill, Tennessee.

The project is a joint venture between GM and LG Energy, making it one of three U.S. factories that will build electric vehicles. The 2.8-million-square-foot plant is expected to create 1,300 manufacturing jobs in Maury County when it opens in 2023. The joint venture already is build-

ing a separate \$2.3 billion, 2.5 million-square-foot battery factory in Lordstown, Ohio, near Cleveland, that will employ about 1,100 people.

"We are taking bold steps necessary to accelerate toward an all-electric future and to support our vision of zero crashes, zero emissions and zero congestion," said GM CEO Mary Barra at a news conference in Nashville.

GM has previously announced that the Cadillac Lyriq electric SUV will be built at the Spring Hill complex. The SUV, due in

showrooms during the first half of 2022, will go an estimated 300 miles (482 kilometers) per charge.

GM is likely to need far more battery capacity if it's able to deliver on a goal of converting all of its new passenger vehicles from internal combustion engines to electricity by 2035.

Gov. Bill Lee declared the new battery plant project "the largest single investment of economic activity in the state's history" while praising the project. Lee, a Republican, and his top economic development chief declined to de-

tail how much the state had provided in incentives but said that information would come out soon.

"We will accommodate the companies as they determine what strategies they're going to take for manufacturing," Lee told reporters. "The demand for their products is enormous, we think this is a very wise investment."

Industry analysts have said automakers face a global shortage of batteries as the industry moves away from gasoline powered vehicles. Most of the world's batteries are built in China and other countries.

Deal to boost Bentley's digital capabilities

Bentley Systems acquires INRO Software

EXTON, Pa., April 18, (Agencies) — Bentley Systems, the infrastructure engineering software company, announced the acquisition of INRO Software, a global leader in multimodal transportation planning, traffic simulation, and mobility visualization software. The acquisition expands Bentley's capabilities in the important growth area of mobility digital twins, just as countries including the U.S. are poised to make a generational investment in infrastructure, and as transportation systems must evolve faster to accommodate both urbanization and carbon reduction goals, and the transition to electric and autonomous vehicles.

INRO, based in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, has for more than 40 years contributed to the advancement of mobility simulation and modeling for metropolitan, regional, and national transport and transit operators and planning agencies. Users of its multimodal simulation offerings include some of the world's busiest transit systems and metros, such as Transport for London, Transport for New South Wales, the Washington State Department of Transportation, the Swedish Transport

Administration Trafikverket, and the public transport system of São Paulo SPTrans.

INRO's products include Emme, a multimodal transportation planning system for urban, regional, and national transportation forecasting; Dynameq, a vehicle-based traffic simulation platform for city-wide traffic planning; and CityPhi, a mobility visualization solution providing data visualization and visual analytics of large-scale mobility and geospatial datasets.

Combining the capabilities of INRO's advanced traffic and vehicle simulation with Bentley's passenger and pedestrian simulation and civil design software, including CUBE, Streetlytics, LEGION, and OpenRoads, places Bentley in a very strong position to deliver comprehensive mobility digital twins of multimodal transportation systems at urban, metropolitan, regional, and national scale.

Urban planners are seeking to understand the ongoing impacts on transportation system performance, reliability, and accessibility of the new opportunities and challenges of private and shared mobility, the propensity for cycling or walking, connected au-

tonomous vehicles, and potential congestion charging. With respect to their traditionally circumscribed use of transportation modeling tools in isolation and only on occasion, multiple advantages are now attainable through mobility digital twins, which can be continuously updated with as-operated engineering conditions and with observed traffic data. Mobility digital twins bring these functions together so that infrastructure planning and simulations can be continuously valuable throughout engineering, construction, and operations.

The pandemic experience reinforces the resilience value of sustaining "evergreen" planning and engineering modeling and simulation to maintain fitness for purpose during unanticipated eventualities. With the priority now on "building back better," it is increasingly recognized that the most economical way to augment infrastructure capacity, while accomplishing the needed energy transitions toward climate sustainability, is to optimize the utilization, configuration, and life extension of existing mobility assets, while adding integrated and appealing public transit options.

Weekly Money Market Report

18 April 2021



Booming US Economic Data

Highlights

- The delivery of over \$280bn in economic impact payments to households following the American Rescue Plan's enactment resulted in positive economic figures for the US in March.
- Both retail sales and jobless claims figures beat expectations just days after reports revealed a 2.6% y/y gain for inflation. The economic reopening and unprecedented levels of support provided by the government are contributing to the inflationary setting.
- China has maintained its robust path towards an economic recovery from the depths of the pandemic as it surpasses its peers with an 18.3% y/y gain in GDP.
- Australia's unemployment rate of 5.6% beat expectations as the labor market's recovery continues to beat forecasts.
- US equities reached record-high levels, while Treasury yields and the USD declined.

United States

Retail Sales Surge, Jobless Claims Ease

According to the Commerce Department, retail sales rose 9.8% in March following a 2.7% decline in February. The figure far exceeded expectations of a 5.8% gain and represented the best month for retail sales since the May 2020 gain of 18.3% which followed the first round of stimulus checks. Looking at the core figure which excludes automobiles, gasoline, building materials and food services, sales rose 6.9% in March following a 3.4% decrease in February. The surge came as Americans received additional pandemic relief checks from the government while increased COVID-19 vaccinations allowed broader economic recovery. The report detailed that all categories within retail sales are above where they were in February of last year, excluding restaurants.

A separate report from the Labor Department revealed that the total number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits tumbled to 576,000 last week, a post-COVID record low. The figure is far below the peak of 900,000 seen in early January and has dropped below the 700,000 level where it had been stuck for months. A total of 16.9 million people are continuing to collect unemployment benefits, down from the 18.2 million in the previous week. Nevertheless, employment in February 2021 was 8.5 million less than in February 2020 - leaving many to estimate that it could take the labor market more than three years to recover. The 576,000 increase is still high relative to history, but the drop does provide an encouraging sign that the pandemic's blowback on labor is fading.

Consumer Prices Rise

Inflation shot higher in March, boosted by the year-over-year comparisons as around this time last year COVID-19 sent prices plummeting. The consumer price index rose 0.6% on a monthly basis and 2.6% on a yearly basis, representing the highest y/y gain since August 2018 and well above the 1.7% recorded in February. Gasoline played the largest role here and is responsible for about half the overall CPI increase as prices are up 22.5% from a year ago. The core CPI figure which excludes the volatile food and energy costs increased 0.3% monthly and 1.6% y/y.

While inflation figures appear high, policymakers at the US Federal Reserve expect the increase to prove only temporary. Figures are likely to decrease once data comparisons stop reflecting the sharp drops seen last year. Fed officials have indicated several times that policy would not be adjusted on short-term jumps in inflation readings. In an interview last week, Fed Chairman Jerome Powell told CBS that he does not

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expect any interest rate hikes this year. The central bank predicts GDP growth of 6.5% this year following the 3.5% contraction in 2020, a sharp rise from the 4.2% forecast given in December.

Markets: Risk-on Mode

The US dollar continued to weaken against the majority of its peers despite the abundance of optimistic economic data revealed towards the end of the week. The best performers against the USD were the AUD and NZD, suggesting the risk-on mode took hold. Surprisingly, bond prices rose with the yield on the 10-year Treasury pushing below the 1.6% despite the positive data specifically in retail sales. This may be attributed to the fact the investors have been anticipating the strong recovery in March/April and have already positioned themselves as such.

Looking at equities, rallies were seen in the US and Europe with the S&P 500 reaching record-high levels. Earnings reports from the largest US banks revealed profit surges in the financial sector, solidifying optimism. Morgan Stanley reported a 150% jump in quarterly profit. Similarly, JPMorgan Chase, Goldman Sachs Group Inc, and Bank of America all recorded high earnings which have reinforced hopes of a swift economic recovery.

Asia

China's Record GDP

China's economic recovery has led to an 18.3% y/y gain in GDP for the first quarter of 2021, the fastest rate on record. The high figure was anticipated given the sharp contraction seen in the Chinese economy when the country went into lockdown during the first quarter of 2020. On a quarterly basis, the economy expanded just 0.6% according to the National Bureau of Statistics. The gain was powered by the fastest rate on record for industrial production at 7% y/y while retail sales rose by 5% y/y. The Bureau also sounded a note of caution: "We must be aware that the Covid-19 epidemic is still spreading globally and the international landscape is complicated with high uncertainties and instabilities." The comeback has also allowed China to gather pace in global trade with exports rising 21.1% in November, the biggest rise since February 2018 which has pushed China's trade surplus to its highest level on record.

Australia

Economic Recovery Led by Employment

Australia's economic recovery is strengthening, illustrated by the 71,000+ jobs added in March which further lowered the unemployment rate to 5.6%. Australia's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic has consistently outpaced forecasts, with unemployment already exceeding the central bank's previous estimate of 6% by the end of this year. In response to the pandemic, the Reserve Bank of Australia cut its key interest rate to a record-low 0.10% and set the same target for the three-year bond yield as it intends to keep borrowing costs low across the economy. RBA Governor Philip Lowe's main goal is to drive unemployment down below 5% in an effort to spark wages growth and revive inflation. Regarding rising rates, Lowe has said rates won't rise until inflation is sustainably back in the RBA's 2-3% target, while the latest data revealed annual inflation at 0.9%. The Aussie rallied 1.5% last week, touching a 3-week high of 0.7761 against the USD.

Commodities

Positive Data Supports Oil

Crude oil prices have rallied alongside the positive economic data and weakness in the USD. The price for Brent crude gained 5.93% last week, reaching a high of \$67.38 before retreating. Moving ahead, the risks for oil remain on the pace of the global economic recovery as COVID-19 cases are still rising globally. Looking at inventories, US crude oil inventories as of April 9th were 1.6% above the seasonal 5-year average. Meanwhile, gold prices were also supported by the lower dollar and lower long-term Treasuries, making the safe-haven metal an attractive hedge against inflation.

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ABK receives Kuwait Blind Association in appreciation of contribution towards Ramadan relief packages



Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently welcomed the Kuwait Blind Association's Board Members, Mr. Fahad Al Enzi and Mr. Mohammed Al Abdullah, who handed a token of appreciation to Mr. Fawzy Al Thunayan, ABK's General Manager of Board Affairs, for ABK's contribution towards its 2021 Ramadan relief packages.

The contribution from ABK will assist Kuwait Blind Association to provide relief packages containing necessary items to 50 disadvantaged visually impaired families during the Holy Month of Ramadan.

ABK's support falls under the Bank's Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives, which aims to promote equality among Kuwait's communities.