

## **US** Rates Watch

# SOFR/FF if liquidity stressed

## Bank liquidity stress could test money market boundaries

We recently flagged risks that banks may already be liquidity strained (see: Fed QT: banks fighting to keep liquidity). Liquidity strained banks risk tighter funding & higher money market rates once Fed ON RRP is substantially depleted. This risks higher SOFR vs FF sooner than the market may anticipate.

In a scenario where banks are liquidity constrained & money market rates rise fast, clients have asked about extremes in money market rates & SOFR/FF. In an extreme scenario, we think SOFR could settle at SRF while FF would likely set in the middle of the SOFR to IOR range. This implies an extreme SOFR/FF basis of -7.5bps. The Fed's expected reaction function is more likely to maintain this spread between -2.5 to -5bps. We think 1y1y SOFR/FF at -3.65bps fairly reflects the balance of these risks, though recommend clients trade this with a tightening bias. Our thoughts on funding boundaries are below.

**History of SOFR & FF above IOR**: during the last liquidity draining cycle of '17-'19, the SOFR-IOR spread was typically double the FF-IOR spread when money market rates were above IOR (Exhibit 1, Exhibit 2). We expect this relationship will hold in the future as SOFR is more sensitive to accumulated dealer positions in need of funding, while FF is less actively utilized as marginal bank funding source.

If the historical relationship holds in an environment of tight funding conditions, we can envision SOFR trading at SRF and FF trading at half of the SOFR-IOR spread. We expect SRF will be a reasonably effective ceiling for SOFR and do not envision it trading meaningfully above the top end of the FF target range.

**Future setting of admin rates**: Fed key administered rates = SRF, IOR, ON RRP (for detail on each see Fed plumbing primer). The Fed can set these rates at any level but we assume they will be set within a 25bps target range to achieve (1) optimal money market control, and (2) minimal cost to taxpayer. Currently, the Fed sets ON RRP 5bps & IOR 15bps from the target range bottom, and SRF at target range top (Exhibit 3).

The Fed may lower IOR & ON RRP 5bps in the future. The Fed would likely only consider lowering these rates if it is confident money market rates will set comfortably above the lower bound. We expect the Fed will judge money markets to remain above the lower bound once fed funds & SOFR start rising and settle 2-3bps above current levels. The Fed has adjusted rates if FF & SOFR were 5bps from the target range top or bottom & threatened to break out above or below the target band (Exhibit 4).

The Fed may consider lowering administered rates to (1) maximize capacity for money markets to trade above administered rates (2) lower cost to the taxpayer for monetary policy control. We expect the Fed will eventually lower both IOR & ON RRP by 5bps each & move these rates lower in parallel; our best guess is this happens in Q2 '24. ... We discuss SOFR/FF in more detail on page 2...

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#### 06 October 2023

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SOFR: Secured Overnight Financing

FF: Fed Funds

ON RRP: Overnight Reverse Repo

Facility

SRF: Standing Repo Facility

IORB: Interest on Reserve Balances

EFFR: Effective Federal Funds Rate

**FF in target range**: the Fed will likely prefer to see FF set in the middle of the target range over time. With today's setting of administered rates, this would imply FF at IOR less 2.5bps. If the Fed shifts the administered rates lower by 5bps in the future, this would imply FF at IOR +2.5bps. We assume this is the preferred setting of FF over time (Exhibit 5).

If the Fed wants to see FF around the range middle and it trades at IOR+2.5 bps, we expect SOFR to trade around 5bps above IOR. This implies FF-SOFR of -2.5bps.

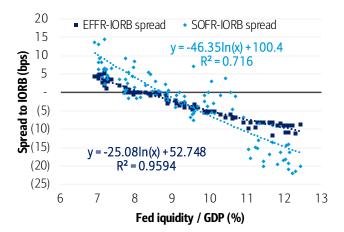
A more extreme case would involve SOFR trading at SRF. In this scenario, we could envision a max SOFR-IOR spread of 15bps & max FF-SOFR spread of 7.5bps. This assumes (1) ON RRP at range bottom & IOR at 10bps above range bottom (2) historical relationship of SOFR & FF above IOR. The Fed would likely interpret frequent SRF usage as implying a need to add reserves & remove collateral from the banking system. This would limit how long FF-SOFR can realize the extreme -7.5bps spread.

**Implications for SOFR/FF basis**: we see risks bank liquidity constraints will allow for meaningful upward money market pressure once ON RRP use is substantially depleted, USSFVF1\* most likely in 2H '24. SOFR/FF is likely to tighten sharply at that time. At the extreme SOFR/FF could trade around -7.5bps but we think the Fed would react by adding liquidity and see it realize -2.5bps to -5bps.

Currently, Sept '24 SOFR/FF trades at -2bps & 1y1y SOFR/FF trades at -3.65bps. We think Sept '24 SOFR/FF could realize tighter but think 1y1y looks reasonably fair given the expected Fed response to a SOFR spike. We encourage clients to trade 2H '24 & 1y1y SOFR/FF with a tightening bias and fade any widening moves.

**Bottom line:** liquidity constrained banks may result in a sharp upward rise of money market rates after ON RRP use is substantially depleted. At the extreme, we can envision SOFR/FF realizing -7.5bps. However, we find it more practical that SOFR/FF would settle between -2.5bps & -5bps. End '24 SOFR/FF may realize tighter but 1y1y SOFR/FF at -3.65bps appears fair to us. We encourage clients to trade the 2H '24 – '25 SOFR/FF basis with a tightening bias and fade any widening moves.

**Exhibit 1: EFFR & SOFR spread to IORB in last QT cycle vs liquidity / GDP** SOFR moves up much faster relative to EFFR in a tightening cycle

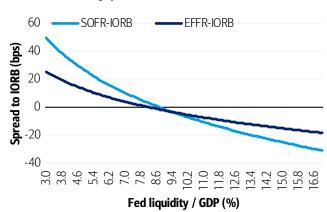


Source: BofA Global Research, Bloomberg, Haver Analytics

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Exhibit 2: Regression output for SOFR & EFFR spread to IORB at different levels of liquidity / GDP

SOFR-IORB beta is roughly 2x EFFR-IORB



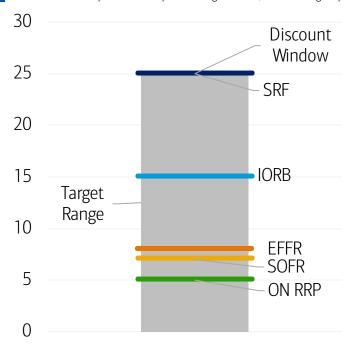
Source: BofA Global Research, Bloomberg, Haver Analytics

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# Exhibit 3: Fed target range and key interest rate tools relative to the target range (bps)

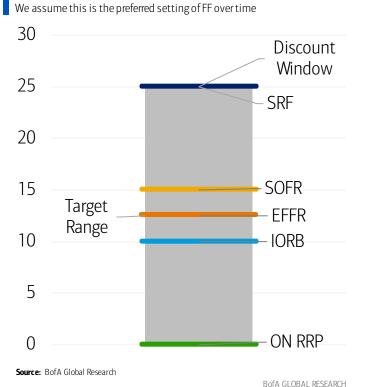
Fed sets ON RRP 5bps & IORB 15bps from range bottom, & SRF at range top



Source: BofA Global Research, Bloomberg

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# Exhibit 5: Hypothetical setting of admin rates in the target range (bps)



# Exhibit 4: Fed funds rate within the target range relative to administered rates (bps)

The Fed has adjusted the admin rates historically to keep EFFR in range



Source: BofA Global Research, Bloomberg

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#### Exhibit 6: Summary statistics on front-end spreads in 2019

SOFR-EFFR spread ranged from -3 to 75bps in 2018 with an avg spread of 3.7bps.

	SOFR-IORB			EFFR-IORB			SOFR-EFFR		
	Average	Max	Min	Average	Max	Min	Average	Max	Min
 2019	6.6	315.0	-3.0	2.4	20.0	0.0	3.7	75.0	-3.0

Source: BofA Global Research, Bloomberg

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