

The Federal Flyer

Slater Announces FY 2000 Borders & Corridors Grants *Texas Benefits from Congressional, Not USDOT, Discretion*

Inside this issue:

FY 2000 Borders & Corridors Grants Announced

1

Senate Committee to Consider FY 2001 Transportation Appropriations

2

At the annual meeting of the U.S. Conference of Mayors in Seattle today, **Vice President Al Gore and Secretary of Transportation Rodney Slater** announced the awards of grants for the FY 2000 National Corridor Planning and Development and Coordinated Border Infrastructure discretionary programs. The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA 21) authorized \$140 million in annual funding for the two programs combined; however, due to statutory obligation limitations, Slater was only able to award \$121.94 million nationwide. Texas received \$18.2 million; the state requested \$139 million for 28 projects.

FY 2000 Appropriations Earmarks Help Direct Funds to Texas. More than half of the available funds for the two programs was directed to be spent on certain congressional earmarks in the FY 2000 transportation appropriations bill. Among those earmarks, **Congressman Tom DeLay** (R - Sugar Land) included \$15 million in funding authority for Corridor 18 in Texas. These funds (reduced to \$13.065 million by the obligation limitation) are to be used for preliminary studies on the corridor, part of future I-69. In addition, Texas was to share in a \$10 million set aside for border inspection and enforcement activities along the U.S. border with Mexico. Of this amount, the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) selected four projects from among the Texas submissions. They are:

- \$1 million for improvements to border safety inspection facilities in Cameron, El Paso, Maverick, Hidalgo, and Webb Counties (Requested: \$18.7 million)
- \$1 million for inspection facilities at four Laredo points of entry (Requested: \$6 million)
- \$1 million for improvements to the Paso del Norte International Bridge in El Paso (Requested: \$2.5 million) and
- \$1.24 million for construction of Bryan Road in Hidalgo County (Requested: \$1.24 million)

Despite Earmarks, Texas Still Short-changed. Of the \$50-60 million of non-earmarked funds available for distribution at USDOT discretion, Texas received only \$1 million (for improvements to rail lines in Brownsville). "Since long before NAFTA, Texas has been short-changed on highway funds while our roads have become more congested and dangerous," said **U.S. Senator Phil Gramm**. "Now, the economic boom generated by NAFTA is stressing the highway system even further. NAFTA has been a great source of jobs and opportunity, and we must upgrade our infrastructure to handle it." **Texas Commissioner of Transportation John W. Johnson** stated: "Although I'm pleased Texas will receive this funding, we can't ignore the bigger picture. We have tremendous transportation needs facing Texas and our border, and this

"...Texas continues to get shorted on discretionary funds allocated by the USDOT."

John W. Johnson
Commissioner of
Transportation

funding doesn't come close enough to help us address them." Noting that Texas border crossings handle approximately 80 percent of U.S.-Mexico truck traffic, Johnson observed that Texas received only 15 percent of the federal funds allocated for trade corridors. "In fact, much of the credit for our funding goes to Congressman DeLay's \$13 million earmark for I-69," Johnson said. "Despite these efforts, Texas continues to get shorted on discretionary funds allocated by the USDOT." Preliminary estimates based on this latest allocation indicate that Texas, the second largest state in the nation, is receiving only 49 cents on the dollar in federal highway discretionary program funds. "Pardon the play on words, but this is literally highway robbery," Johnson declared.

Senate Committee to Consider FY 2001 Transportation Appropriations *Rail Funding, Other Provisions Stir Controversy*

Next week, the U.S. Senate Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee is tentatively scheduled to consider H.R. 4475, the FY 2001 appropriations bill for the U.S. Department of Transportation and Related Agencies. While the bill as passed by the U.S. House of Representatives follows TEA 21 funding principles and authorization levels, a few proposed amendments to the bill might put its quick passage in doubt.

Expected Transportation Funding Levels. In its \$55 billion bill, the House rejected the Clinton Administration's proposal to redirect portions of the Revenue Aligned Budget Authority funds to certain targeted programs. The Senate Committee is expected to take a similar stance, providing funding for highways and transit programs as directed in TEA 21 and for aviation programs according to the new funding principles of AIR 21. However, since the Senate committee's allocation for transportation spending is slightly lower than that provided in the House, the committee will have to make some adjustments to other transportation programs (namely Coast Guard and Amtrak) to honor both TEA 21 and AIR 21. We will report on the committee's final funding decisions in the next issue of the **Federal Flyer**.

Controversial Amendments Filed. While some debate may arise over how to best fund programs under the spending cap, other issues are likely to dominate the committee's attention. First, **Senator George Voinovich** (R - Ohio), chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee's Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure, plans to introduce a provision from his bill, S. 1144, that would allow states to use Highway Trust Fund dollars for rail projects. Fellow committee member **Kit Bond** (R - Missouri) objects to this language, with the strong backing of the highway lobbying community. **House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Bud Shuster** (R - Pennsylvania) succeeded in removing similar language before the House passed H.R. 4475.

Another item of controversy for committee discussion is the House language that restricts the USDOT from spending funds to adjust the fuel economy standards for new vehicles. Environmentalists are expected to press senators to strike this language from the bill.



The *Federal Flyer* is a publication of the TxDOT Legislative Affairs Office. It is intended to provide up-to-date information on major legislative activities in the 106th Congress for the management of the Texas Department of Transportation, state leaders, and others interested in Texas transportation issues. This report will also feature key activities in the national transportation community. Sources include news services and staff reports.

Coby Chase, Director of Legislative Affairs, serves as publisher and can be reached at (512) 463-6086. The department's federal legislative analysts are Joe Guzzo (202-638-3927), Tonia Norman Ramirez (512-463-9957), and David Soileau (512-463-6081). Please contact any of the staff for information on federal transportation and legislative issues.

This publication will be filed with the State Publications Clearinghouse in the State Library in accordance with the Texas State Depository Law.

