

# The *Federal Flyer*

A Publication of the Legislative Affairs Office, Texas Department of Transportation

September 11, 1998

Vol. IV, No. 14

## **Texans Call for Fairness, Equity at Border/Corridor Conference Houston to Host Third and Final Conference**

*LAO's Anna K. Hayes attended the San Diego meeting and submitted this report.*

Asking for "fairness and equity," Texas was well-represented at the August 25<sup>th</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) "listening session" held in San Diego, California. Approximately 35 to 40 Texans attended the conference on the National Corridor Planning and Development and Coordinated Border Infrastructure discretionary programs, including **Texas State Senators Eliot Shapleigh** (D - El Paso), **David Sibley** (D - Waco), and **Carlos Truan** (D - Corpus Christi).

**John Horsley**, USDOT Associate Deputy Secretary and Director of the Office of Intermodalism, moderated the session. He stated that USDOT's philosophy on implementing these programs and others in the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA 21) was to respect the letter and intent of the law, reduce bureaucracy and paperwork, and increase field personnel. USDOT will be looking at things like greater local share, use of advanced technology, and coordination with border operating agencies when choosing projects, Horsley said.

"The public will not have confidence in the programs if they are seen as pork barrel (projects)," stated Senator Sibley, a member on the panel discussing the National Corridor Planning and Development Program. He said that using fair and equitable project selection criteria is a must when USDOT decides which projects to fund in these two programs. Sibley

also asked that the money not be divided between the two programs.

**Sam Vale**, representing the Border Trade Alliance, also called for equity. "Borders and corridors must connect and each must be funded fairly," he said. "Emphasis should be placed on border projects which connect to important corridors, and law enforcement activities should have separate funding." Vale also spoke in favor of giving additional points to counties which had low per capita income and high unemployment rates.

**Randy DeLay**, representing the Border Infrastructure Coalition, stated that applications from metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) should have equal weight with state DOT applications. He also said that scoring criteria should be identified in the two programs as set out in TEA 21. Equal weight should be given to all criteria unless there is compelling evidence that some criteria should be weighted more than others, DeLay said.

Senator Eliot Shapleigh asked that USDOT look closely at border problems. "Where the borders and corridors meet, fix it first," he said. Shapleigh also stated that "the U.S. has yet to develop an adequate model which separates the functions of interdiction and commerce. We have been schizophrenic with NAFTA in letting interdiction override commerce." Finally, he stated that the scoring criteria must be objective so everyone knows how they are to be graded.



Other participants also called for alleviating congestion at the border. Using Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) technology to make border crossings more efficient was touted by several speakers including **Dean Dunphy**, Secretary for the California Department of Business, Transportation, and Housing.

**Dan Hammer**, Regional Director for U.S. **Senator Barbara Boxer** (D - California), read a letter from the senator which stated that “if something is not done at the border, then the nation will go from check points to choke points.”

**Lee Denno**, California Highway Patrol, said that law enforcement agencies should be involved in planning border inspection facilities. He also said that inspection training should continue for Mexican counterparts, and the same inspection standards should be applied on both sides of the border. ITS technology should be used to give pre-approved trucks by-pass privileges.

Texas representation accounted for almost 20 percent of the attendees at the San Diego meeting, which had representation from Mexico, Arizona, California, Louisiana, New Mexico, Texas, and Washington. An aide for **Congressman Silvestre Reyes** (D - El Paso) also attended the San Diego meeting. Other Texas attendees included **Mike Allen**, McAllen Economic Development Corporation; **Allan Johnson**, Texas Turnpike Authority board member; **Lester Mills**, Texas Department of Public Safety; **Ross Milloy**, Austin-San Antonio Corridor Coalition; representatives from the cities of Brownsville, Eagle Pass, El Paso, Laredo, Lubbock, and Rio Grande; and a representative from Frio County.

**Detroit Session Reveals Similar Comments.** USDOT held another “listening session” in Detroit on August 27<sup>th</sup>. At that hearing, **Gloria Jeff**, Deputy Federal Highway Administrator

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and former Michigan DOT executive, said that the USDOT should publish guidance policy in

early November with project awards being made in March of 1999.

According to reports from the *Bureau of National Affairs*, several attendees at the Detroit hearing supported a balanced distribution of funds between the north and the south. They also suggested that USDOT disburse funding based on the volume and value of trade. Others, however, pointed out that USDOT may not have accurate or adequate data needed to distribute funds this way.

**Texas Meeting Scheduled for October 8<sup>th</sup>.** At the invitation of **Texas Commissioner of Transportation David Laney**, along with requests from **Congressmen Tom DeLay** (R - Sugarland), **Nick Lampson** (D - Beaumont), and **Ken Bentsen** (D - Houston), the USDOT has announced that they will hold another “listening session” on the National Corridor Planning and Development program and the Coordinated Border Infrastructure program in Texas before they develop program guidance and issue the call for project applications. The meeting, will be held in Houston on Thursday, October 8<sup>th</sup> at the Holiday Inn Select (US 59 South at Kirby).

The Houston meeting is an opportunity to show USDOT that Texas is united in its desire to bring a significant portion of funds from these two discretionary programs to Texas. John Horsley will once again serve as moderator for the meeting, which will follow the format used in the previous two sessions. There will be two panels: one focused on the National Corridor Planning and Development program and the other discussing the Coordinated Border Infrastructure program.

Please contact the Texas Division of the Federal Highway Administration (512-916-5511) for more information.

