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"Worshipping at the altar of fiscal short-sightedness will carry a high price when our aviation system becomes hopelessly congested. If we do not make the investments that are necessary we risk the destruction of one of the economic engines that keeps our economy roaring."
Bud Shuster

Shuster Rejects Senate FAA Authorization Proposal

H.R. 1000 Is Dead for This Session

Although the House-Senate Conference on H.R. 1000, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) authorization bill, met for several weeks this fall, the conferees were unable to develop an agreeable compromise for passage this year. This situation leaves both small and large airports across the nation without continued airport improvement program (AIP) funding until Congress finally succeeds in passing a long-term authorization measure for the nation's aviation programs.

Shuster Rejects Senate Proposals. On November 10, 1999, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman **Bud Shuster** (R—PA) issued a press release stating that he has rejected Senate proposals to cut aviation spending. The Senate negotiators, led by Budget Committee Chairman **Pete Domenici** (R—NM), have insisted on their proposal to eliminate the general fund contribution to the federal aviation budget and spend approximately $3 billion less over the next three years than the House proposal. Senators proved unwilling to back down from their position that aviation spending be subject to the federal budget process, rather than allowing full funding to flow from the user-fee-based trust fund.

"The Senate proposal simply fails to recognize the growing needs in aviation, such as the projected one billion people that will be flying annually just a few years from now," Shuster said. He also stated that he continues to oppose further short-term extensions of the aviation programs. "This band-aid approach can only delay the significant investments that

the flying public has paid for and deserves. I pledge that I will renew my efforts next year to unlock the Aviation Trust Fund and fulfill our commitment to make our skies as safe as they can be," Shuster said in his November 10 press release.

What's Next for Aviation Funding? The current fiscal year began October 1 without any continued authorization for funding of FAA programs, including the Airport Improvement Program (AIP), which provides money for Texas' general aviation and reliever airport program. After passage of the FY 2000 omnibus spending measure this weekend, Congress ended its work for the year. Rather than allow the nation's aviation programs to go without funding until a long-term reauthorization bill is passed, the Senate last week passed S. 1916, yet another short-term extension of FAA program funding authority. However, instead of adding the measure to the omnibus spending bill, the House chose to allow the funding to lapse until next spring.

The Texas Department of Transportation's Aviation Division administers the general aviation and reliever airport program for the FAA in Texas. The current plan calls for 32 federal projects to be implemented during Fiscal Year 2000. Of these projects, 15 airport design projects are underway; now that Congress has chosen not to extend funding for the AIP until at least next spring, the department will delay work on these design projects, which will ultimately delay construction of these facilities. Without the restoration of funding early next spring, the remaining 17 projects that are scheduled for construction in Fiscal Year 2000 could be affected. If Congress again delays federal AIP funding next year, the department will have two full years of projects that are behind by a year.

First Session of 106th Congress Ends

Budget Agreement Clears the Way

The First Session of the 106th Congress came to a close last week on the heels of an agreement between the White House and Republican leaders of Congress to a nearly $400 billion spending bill for key domestic programs in Fiscal Year 2000.

The agreement includes a largely symbolic 0.38 percent across-the-board cut in domestic discretionary programs. We do not know at this time what impact the cut will have on transportation programs.

The Second Session of the 106th Congress will convene on January 3, 2000. Among the transportation issues to be dealt with are FAA reauthorization, the beginning of the FY 2001 appropriations process, and water resources authorization measures. The Legislative Affairs Office will be there to cover these important developments for you.

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.

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