



Transfer

Surface Transportation Policy Project's Electronic Update

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Announcements



The Congress for the New Urbanism will be holding its eleventh annual Congress, to be held June 19 to 22 in Washington, D.C. The Congress is the foremost conference for people interested in building or restoring walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods.

[Click here](#) for more information.

[Transfer Archives](#)

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Senate Transit Panel Members Critical of SAFETEA, Citing Weak Funding Commitments, Changes to New Starts and Bus Programs

Members of the Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee July 10 reviewed the transit proposals in the Administration's "SAFETEA" package, indicating strong opposition to several key elements of this plan for renewing TEA-21. Many Senators expressed concern that \$46 billion, six-year spending total for transit program was inadequate, with several indicating that the commitment was even lower since \$37.6 billion or about 80 percent of the total is actually guaranteed. Most panel members, like their colleagues through the Senate, support a transit spending level of \$56.5 billion, which is the target for spending that was adopted overwhelmingly by the Senate during action on the budget resolution.



In addition to expressing concerns about the funding levels, Chairman Shelby (R-AL) and Ranking Member Sarbanes (D-MD) indicated their opposition to SAFETEA's proposals that reduce the federal match for new starts projects and eliminate the bus discretionary program, views broadly shared by other committee members in opening statements and during questioning of Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta.

The effort to shift federal funding for new starts from 80% to 50% while maintaining the 80% federal share for highway projects was noted often as a change that would interfere with local decision-making as well as the Administration's plan to leave "new starts" funding largely outside of the funding guarantee. Although Mineta noted his pivotal role in creating parity for both highways and transit in ISTEA, when the 90/10 ratio for highways and the 75/25 ratio for transit were leveled to an equal 80/20 share for both modes, several members suggested that a higher local match would have prevented new transit markets, such as Salt Lake City, from initiating projects that are now considered a success. Senator Rick Santorum (R-PA) stated that "big projects that are important for the transformation of our cities would get pushed back in favor of smaller projects" without this level playing field.

Members praised TEA-21's guaranteed funding for transit, explaining how it helped improve services for rural residents, seniors, working families, commuters and other users as well as helped deliver quality of life benefits such as congestion relief, pollution reduction, economic development, and national security.

For more information on the hearing, visit <http://banking.senate.gov/hrq03.htm#jun03>.

Administration Conveys Opposition to Baucus-Grassley Bond Plan

During his remarks to the Senate Banking



Committee, Secretary Norman Y. Mineta conveyed the Administration's position on the Baucus-Grassley bonding plan, signaling its opposition to any proposal that would reduce the federal gas tax commitment to transit. At the July 10 hearing, Senators Rick Santorum (R-PA), Robert Bennett (R-UT) and Tom Carper (D-DE) were among the Banking Committee members expressing their opposition to the transit financing proposal being championed by leaders of the Senate's tax-writing panel.



Shifting existing federal gas tax commitments from transit to highway spending and funding future transit needs with a new federal bonding mechanism are the central tenets of a financing plan being developed by Senate Finance Committee Chair Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and the panel's Ranking Minority Member Max Baucus (D-MT).

National, regional and local organizations continue to weigh into the debate on this bonding plan, conveying their opposition to the Baucus-Grassley plan. Recently, the Amalgamated Transit Union, The Community Transportation Association of America, and the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations along with the American Planning Association wrote separately to Senate leaders indicating their opposition to the Baucus-Grassley financing plan.

[Hutchison to Introduce Amtrak Reauthorization Legislation](#)

Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas) recently announced her intention to introduce a bill to reauthorize Amtrak providing the nation's intercity passenger rail carrier with \$10 billion over 5 years. Echoing Amtrak President David Gunn's reauthorization proposal in January, Hutchison's bill will also focus repairs and improvements to Amtrak's railroad infrastructure, permitting up to \$40 billion in government guaranteed bonds for upgrades to freight corridors and \$10 billion for improvements to Amtrak's most successful route, the DC to Boston Northeast Corridor. The legislation will also require Amtrak to achieve an 80 percent on-time record, or face competition from private and governmental bidding on routes that fail to meet that goal.



At a June 5 Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine hearing, Hutchison pushed the administration to make a serious commitment to Amtrak's future, saying that their effort "looks like a phase out to me." Hutchison chairs this panel which oversees Amtrak issues.

Amtrak funding is separate from the reauthorization of TEA-21. Department of Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta recently announced that the Administration's proposal for Amtrak reauthorization would be delivered to Congress before the August Congressional recess.

[GAO Report Finds Early Partnerships Among Stakeholders Is the Most Promising Approach to Improving Project Delivery](#)

A recently released GAO report surveyed 33 stakeholder organizations on approaches for reducing highway project completion time. Respondents identified 13 most promising



approaches, falling into three broad categories -- improving project management, delegating environmental review and permitting authority, and improving agency staffing and skills. By far the most promising approach identified was to establish early partnerships and coordination among stakeholders. Thirty of thirty-three respondents indicated that this approach has great or very great potential for reducing project delivery time. The GAO survey also found strong support for interagency funding agreements, increased use of context sensitive design/solutions, greater use of GIS technology, and additional opportunities for public involvement.



STPP and its coalition members have long argued that early and continuous coordination with stakeholder agencies and the public could do far more to improve project delivery than legislative changes to NEPA and other laws protecting national treasures. The recently released report from Defenders of Wildlife and STPP entitled "Second Nature" specifically highlighted improved agency coordination as an effective strategy.

To read the full GAO report, visit <http://www.gao.gov/highlights/d03398high.pdf>.

For more on why environmental "streamlining" won't improve project delivery, see STPP's decoder on the subject at <http://www.transact.org/library/decoder/streamliningdecoder3.pdf>.

To read Second Nature, visit <http://www.defenders.org/habitat/highways/>.



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