

KENTUCKY

Transportation News

Vol. XXI, No. 20

Published by Kentuckians for Better Transportation

July 17, 2009

Oberstar, DeFazio, Voinovich Urge Six-Year Authorization

“Wake up over there in the White House. This will put people to work.”

House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Chair James L. Oberstar (D-MN) and Subcommittee on Highways and Transit Chair Peter A. DeFazio (D-OR) were joined by Sen. George Voinovich (R-OH) to voice opposition to the Administration’s proposed 18-month surface transportation extension plan. The trio said Congress should move ahead with T & I’s \$500 billion, six-year authorization bill now being developed in the House.

“The Interstate highway system,” said Oberstar, “gave America its greatest spurt of economic growth in the history of this country, and we need to sustain that growth by sustaining the investment in surface transportation. That is what this legislation will do.

“An 18-month extension will put us into the next Presidential election cycle. It will take four years to finish, not a year and a half. I know how Congress works. Inertia becomes the enemy of progress. If they don’t understand that at the White House, I suggest those highfalutin economists get out of their chauffeured limousines and get on the streets and drive like the rest of Americans and choke on congestion that is stifling America’s economy and choking our cities. Wake up over there in the White House. This will put people to work. We are ready to move and we should move now.”

“An 18-month delay . . . is short-sighted, unacceptable, and will harm our economic recovery,” added DeFazio. “Our six-year authorization bill will create or sustain double the amount of jobs as an extension. We cannot afford to walk away from one million jobs at a time when we are experiencing a struggling economy and high unemployment.”

Voinovich said he does not support the 18-month extension because it provides inadequate revenue for the nation’s transportation needs. The extension, he said, would mean Congress is “blowing a golden opportunity. Why not move on a multi-year bill that is going to make a difference -- a robust, break-the-mold bill. When the public sees it, they will say ‘this is something we want to get done. This is something we want to pay for.’”

Brent Spence Example of Problem

Voinovich cited the Brent Spence Bridge as an example of the national infrastructure problem. He said the “safety record there is five times worse than the state safety record average. Congestion is terrible. We have this all over the country. We need to go after things that make the most difference. We need to speed up delivery of projects.”

Voinovich said the Administration’s extension is a plan “to rob Peter to pay Paul at an inadequate level. All of us are going to be paying more under the energy bill whether we know it or not. Under a transportation bill, we’ll know what we are paying for.”

The lawmakers said a six-year bill is needed to give states and other recipients time to plan their long-term construction projects. Short-term extensions cause uncertainty and disrupt the planning process, resulting in fewer projects, fewer jobs, and less economic growth.

The T & I Committee is preparing its bill for mark-up, pending action by the Committee on Ways and Means on the revenue title. The current authorization is due to expire Sept. 30. The HTF could run short of cash as early as next month. Oberstar supports transferring \$7.3 billion from the General Fund to the HTF to ensure funds are available to reimburse states for obligated highway projects and carry the program until the new authorization bill is enacted. He says \$7.3 billion has been used in recent years for national hurricane and flood disasters when general funds should have been used. Congress has two weeks to fix the problem before the House takes a scheduled five-week-long summer recess running through Labor Day. The Senate's recess is slated to begin Aug. 8 and also run through Labor Day.

Senate EPW Committee Approves 18-Month Extension

The proposed \$500 billion six-year surface transportation program took another hit this week. The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, on Wednesday, approved the Obama Administration's proposed 18-month extension of the surface transportation program as authorized under SAFETEA-LU. The legislation passed with an overwhelming 18-1 vote. The lone dissenting vote was by Sen. George Voinovich (R-OH).

The Senate legislation is drafted in the form of a continuing resolution that continues all programs and projects with no policy changes. Committee Chair Barbara Boxer (D-CA) said it will be merged with legislation in the Commerce and Banking Committees to extend the portions of SAFETEA-LU that are within their jurisdictions, and a provision from the Finance Committee that will restore \$20 billion to the Highway Trust Fund. She said it includes an authorization of \$41 billion in 2010 and \$20.5 billion in 2011.

U. S. Chamber tells Congress Nation Can't Wait 18 Months

As the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee was approving an 18-month extension of the existing surface transportation program, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce was in Washington telling lawmakers they need to get the job done sooner.

The Chamber is waging a major national campaign to pass a six-year transportation bill quickly to help keep U.S. businesses competitive. The Chamber supports increasing the motor fuels user fee to fund the program. The fee hasn't been raised since 1993, and an increase is seen by the Administration and some others as a political liability. USDOT Secretary Ray LaHood repeated in a congressional hearing this week that the Administration wouldn't raise the gas tax during a recession.

The idea that Congress is unwilling to raise taxes is "laughable," said Office Depot Chief Executive Steve Odland, citing climate-change legislation that would force businesses to purchase permits for greenhouse-gas emissions, and a proposed surtax on the wealthiest Americans to help pay for a health-care overhaul. Among some 100 business executives accompanying the Chamber to Capitol Hill this week, Odland was quoted by *The Wall Street Journal*.



Beshear, Daniels, Bridges Proponents Celebrate

With Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson, state legislators and other Louisville Bridges proponents looking on, Gov. Steve Beshear ceremonially signed House Bill 3 creating a funding mechanism for some of the state's mega projects. Senate President David Williams, far left, and Rep. Don Pasley, immediately behind Beshear, were instrumental in the enactment of the legislation creating the Kentucky Public Transportation Infrastructure Authority. The bill will allow the Louisville Bridges Project and the I-69 bridge project near Henderson to move forward. The legislation also provides for the creation of authorities to manage other mega-projects solely within Kentucky.

"Governor Daniels and I recognize," said Beshear, "the importance of modern river crossings to both of our states. Kentucky and Indiana are quite literally at the hub of America's interstate commerce. We also recognize that these are massive projects, too costly to be undertaken entirely by one state with only our traditional sources of transportation revenue."

Indiana has \$600 million already set aside for the Louisville Bridges project. The Kentucky General Assembly has authorized \$175.1 million in GARVEEs for the project for the current biennium. The four out years -- FY 11-14 -- of the Six-Year Highway Plan include \$352 million in GARVEEs designated for the project. (Photo provided by Kentucky Office of Creative Services.)

Beshear Announces \$21 Million for Discretionary County Road Use

Gov. Steve Beshear announced yesterday 20 percent -- about \$21 million -- of the Rural Secondary Fund will be set aside for possible use on local roads that counties have identified as priorities.

Under the Governor's initiative, the \$21 million in set-aside funds can be used on either county roads or state rural secondary routes. Fiscal courts will be invited to set project priorities. The Department of Highways will evaluate the project list. Once the department concurs, individual projects will be approved and funding will be made available. During the Brown Administration, the law was changed to allow the use of Rural Secondary funds on county roads.

Speaking at a meeting of the Kentucky County Judge-Executives Association and the Kentucky Magistrates and Commissioners Association, Beshear said the projected \$239 million shortfall in the Kentucky Road Fund this year limits the state's ability to assist counties. "We have great needs in the state rural secondary road system," said Beshear, "but we recognize you may have even greater needs on your county roads. This is to give you some flexibility in addressing the road needs in your counties."

Beshear recently announced that the Transportation Cabinet, using construction contingency funds, would cover the cost of ice storm debris removal that cities and counties ordinarily would have been required to shoulder.

Kentucky Unemployment at 26-Year High

Kentucky's seasonally adjusted preliminary unemployment rate for June reached a near 26-year high of 10.9 percent from a revised 10.7 percent in May, according to the Kentucky Office of Employment and Training. June's jobless rate was the highest since the August 1983 figure of 11.1 percent. The June unemployment rate is 4.5 percentage points higher than the 6.4 percent rate recorded in June 2008.



“There are no other bridges in Kentucky like this, just as there is no other place in Kentucky like the Land Between the Lakes,” said Gov. Steve Beshear as he unveiled the design of two new Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley bridges. The twin basket handle, tied-arch spans will be unique in Kentucky. From left are Calloway County Judge/Executive Larry Elkins, Trigg County Judge/Executive Stan Humphries, Beshear, Rep. Mike Cherry, KYTC Secretary Joe Prather, Rep. John Tilley, Sen. Ken Winters, and Rep. Melvin Henley. (Photo provided by Ryan Watts, KYTC, Office of Public Affairs.)

Beshear unveils design for US 68 lakes bridges

Basket handle arch spans a signature gateway to the Land Between the Lakes

At a news conference this week at Lake Barkley State Resort Park, Gov. Steve Beshear unveiled the design of two bridges that will carry US 68/KY 80 across Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley.

“I’m thrilled to present a design that makes a bold statement about western Kentucky and the Lakes region,” Gov. Beshear said. “These impressive structures will form a signature gateway to the Land Between the Lakes and two essential components of a modernized ‘68/80’ corridor.”

The new bridges will replace a pair of narrow, steel bridges that were built in 1932 to span the Cumberland and Tennessee rivers many years before the rivers were impounded to form the lakes and the Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area.

The tied-arch design for the new bridges offers a good balance of practicality, cost effectiveness and aesthetic appeal, according to design engineers. The new 550-foot, four-lane spans will include 11-foot lanes, 4-foot shoulders and an 8-foot sidewalk and bike path. The bridges will tie in with the reconstructed US 68/KY 80 corridor. Design consultants for the bridge are Michael Baker Jr., Inc. and Palmer Engineering Co.

Each bridge will cost an estimated \$178 million to build, including design work. Construction is scheduled to begin in 2011. The entire US 68 corridor reconstruction, including the bridges project, is expected to be complete by late 2017. Programmed funding for the bridges includes \$290 million in GARVEES.