

PB Washington Update - Interim Report - May 27, 2011

Earlier this week, the bi-partisan leadership of the Senate Environment & Public Works Committee released a joint statement regarding the status of the development of a multi-year surface transportation authorization bill. Here is a [link](#) to the press release and here is a [link](#) to a video of a press conference held by EPW Chairwoman Barbara Boxer (D-CA) regarding the Committee's progress.

This is the first official comment by the joint Committee leadership about their draft bill. The bill will be called "Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century" (MAP-21). The key components of the bill will include funding programs at current levels (details and revenue sources to be determined), eliminating earmarks, consolidating numerous programs to focus on national goals, creating a freight program, creating a new TIFIA-like loan program to be called "America Fast Forward", and expediting project delivery. The TIFIA program may be funded at as much as \$1B per year. Boxer also indicated that bike and pedestrian programs would continue to be funded, unlike in the House where those programs appear to be on the chopping block.

Many of these elements are very similar to what House T&I Committee Chairman John Mica (R-FL) has said he plans to include in the House version of the SAFETEA-LU reauthorization bill which is being drafted solely by the Republican staff. However, without access to the specific details, it is difficult to determine whether the two bills are actually on the same track. One major difference in the bills is the potential total level of funding. In the House, Chairman Mica has said he will work within the available balances in the Highway Trust Fund which would mean a six-year bill of approximately \$220B. Chairwoman Boxer indicated the Senate hopes to write a bill funded at approximately \$339.2B, which is the SAFETEA-LU level of \$286B plus an inflation factor and additional funding for an expanded TIFIA program. The EPW Committee will have to work with the Senate Finance Committee to identify the needed resources, in addition to working with the Banking and Commerce Committees to incorporate the details of the transit, safety, research, and potentially rail titles of the bill.

Another potential difference in the bills is the length of the authorization. Chairman Mica continues to insist that the House bill will be six years in length. Although Boxer referred to the EPW bill as a six-year bill, she also noted, "our goal is to attain the optimum achievable authorization length depending on resources available." Later in her press conference she added that, "a two year bill is in the mix". The amount of funding available will determine the length of the bill, with Boxer mentioning the possibility of additional transfers from the General Fund, an option House Republicans are on record as opposing.

Both committees had hoped to unveil their bills before the Memorial Day recess, but late June now seems more likely with committee action in July. The EPW Committee plans to hold several hearings once the bill has been introduced.

While these are all very positive signs that Congress is serious about trying to pass a surface transportation bill this year, there is a long way to go and many pitfalls ahead.