

TRANSPORTATION IN AN ELECTION YEAR

*The FBT Retreat Brings Together Cross Section
of People to Discuss Politics in Transportation*

*The 2004 Floridians
for Better Transportation
(FBT) Retreat had “folks
experiencing first hand ...
the intersection between
transportation and politics,”
said FBT President Doug
Callaway.*



The FBT Retreat brought together an array of people from all segments of the transportation industry, people interested in transportation, along with leaders, to discuss what has happened in transportation during this past session and what the future might hold for everything from funding, to high-speed rail to homeland security.

The FBT Retreat provides a forum to discuss the future of an industry that affects everybody. “That’s important because what we’re all about is building a transportation constituency that goes beyond folks that build roads and quite frankly goes beyond people that actually earn their livelihood somehow, somehow in the transportation arena, but to

the chambers of commerce, to the general population, to the supermarkets, to attractions, to everybody, everyone in Florida," explained Callaway. "There really is no other forum to have this group of folks get together."

More than 160 attendees gathered at the Renaissance Orlando Resort at SeaWorld, July 15-16, to hear about transportation in an election year – the biggest political race this year being the presidential election. Well-known political analyst Charlie Cook kicked off the event by discussing the intricacies of the presidential election and why it is such a close race.

Cook said that the main thing people ask themselves when a president is up for re-election is, "Do I believe that this incumbent has performed well enough to deserve re-election? Do I have confidence in this president to lead us another four years?" The main thing this is based on is the economy, but the majority of Americans do not credit Bush with an improvement in the economy, therefore he is not a shoe-in. But according to Cook, Kerry has not secured the vote either.

Finding Funding

The outcome of the presidential election could have a profound effect on the transportation industry with the federal transportation bill still up for debate. Jim Kolb of the American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA) and Lowell Clary, Florida Department of Transportation Secretary of Finance & Administration were both on hand to discuss the status of federal transportation funding during the Federal Transportation Panel.

Kolb began the discussion by reiterating where things stand with the federal funding debate in Washington, stating that the Bush Administration's proposal of \$256 billion would keep funding flat, without any growth and is actually a step backwards when inflation is taken into account; and that the House bill is barely treading water to keep up with the swell of inflation.

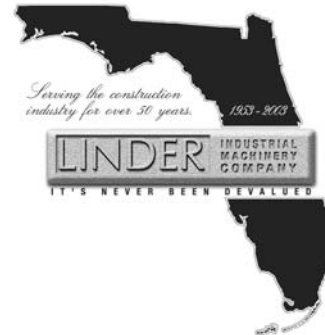
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Kolb explained the need for increased funding by pointing out that congestion and highway fatalities have risen, and that road conditions and alignment are a factor in 33 percent of all crashes. "Short changing the federal highway and transit investment poses a cost on all Americans, really a kind of hidden tax."

Kolb added that the conference formed to create a consensus on the transportation funding bill between the House and the Senate is the largest ever established; thus making it difficult to get things done, and made all the more difficult by the congressional schedule. He also updated the audience on the latest of the ever-changing funding proposals being discussed between the two branches, which at that time was an offer by the Senate for \$296 billion, but has since moved from an offer by the Senate for \$301 billion, to an offer by the House for \$299 billion with another extension granted until March 31, 2005. Kolb concluded that ARTBA's position is, "better to get things done right than just get things done," even if that does



Marian Johnson, executive director of the Florida Chamber Political Institute, reviews the candidates up for election.

mean waiting until after the November election.

Clary discussed what was needed in a federal transportation bill from Florida's

perspective. "What our priorities are, in TEA-21 we received an 86-percent return, what we hope to accomplish is a 95-percent return. Can you say 95-percent return? ... If we don't have our business partners and the overall industry talking about it loudly and often, that's what it's going to take to get there. Also, tolling revisions, Florida does a good bit of tolling in our state; it's the equivalent of about 10 cents of gas tax in the state of Florida. ... Also, the environmental review process."

After the Federal Transportation Panel, Senator Daniel Webster and Representative Leslie Waters offered a State "Review" Panel that discussed some of the highlights of what happened in the transportation industry during this past state legislative session, such as keeping the state transportation trust fund intact, enacting the largest work program ever undertaken, the creation of the Strategic Intermodal System (SIS), funding the Small County Outreach Program and Small County Road Assistance Program, funding homeland security, and budgeting money for intermodal centers for the high-speed rail constitutional amendment.

That was followed by a State "Preview" Panel with Marian Johnson, executive director of the Florida Chamber Political Institute. Johnson reviewed all of the candidates up for election this year and explained that it is important to know what's happening with elections and get involved because "it gives us a chance to take a look at these seats and say, 'This might be our chance to get our person in the legislature,' and it's OK to feel that way. You need people who understand the transportation issue in the legislature. What better place to have somebody to stand up for you and to fight for you."

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Attendees also had the opportunity to listen to Senate candidate Mel Martinez, former HUD secretary. Martinez explained that one of his top priorities if elected would be getting a fair share for Florida's transportation funding. He explained how he saw similar inequities in housing funds when he was with HUD and that he changed the rules to fix that unfairness and he wants to do the same for transportation. "I will fight to make sure that we get our fair share. We must do that. You see, our future depends on being able to provide the kind of quality of life that Floridians have always enjoyed and had; and



Senate candidate and former HUD Secretary Mel Martinez stresses his goal of getting Florida its fair share of federal transportation funds.

everyday as we increase congestion on our roads ... and as we have decreasing quality of life, we begin to lose a little bit of what's made Florida such a great place for us to live and enjoy."

The first day concluded with an awards presentation to four people who helped FBT be successful in saving \$100 million from being diverted from the Florida highway trust fund. Those



FBT President Doug Callaway (from left) honors FTBA's Bob Bureson and Alice Rasmussen, Jim Cordero of the Florida Asphalt Contractors and Frank Rudd of the Florida Engineering Society for their work in saving \$100 million from being diverted from the Florida Highway trust fund.

individuals were Jim Cordero with the Florida Asphalt Contractors Association, Frank Rudd with the Florida Engineering Society, and Alice Rasmussen and Bob Bureson of FTBA.

Politics in Transportation

The second day began with a presentation by Fred Leonhardt of Gray Robinson and chairman of the Florida Chamber on the VoteSmart Florida.org Alliance, a group of diverse Floridians committed to fixing the state's constitutional amendment process. Leonhardt explained that Florida has the easiest constitution in the U.S. to amend and currently there are 50 proposed amendments to the constitution in process. "Since the ratification of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights over 200 years ago, only 27 proposed amendments have become part of the U.S. Constitution. This is in contrast to the Florida Constitution being amended 95 times since 1970, which adds new bureaucracy and billions of dollars in new state programs." The concern is in finding funding for these new programs, other state programs – such as transportation – can be cut. VoteSmartFlorida.org is fighting this by creating voter aware-

ness, taking legislative action and vote yes/no campaigns.

Tom Gallagher, CFO for the state of Florida, and Fred Dudley, chairman of the Florida High Speed Rail Authority, an organization created to meet a new state program created by a constitutional amendment made in 2001, discussed high-speed rail (HSR). During this session the speakers discussed the pluses and minuses of an HSR system, as well as dispelled myths about the system and discussed a constitutional amendment to revoke the 2001 amendment that called for an HSR system.

A panel discussion was also held on Florida's SIS investment and regional planning and measures that were taken to improve homeland security along Florida's seaports. The event concluded with a keynote address by Lt. Gov. Toni Jennings on the importance of transportation to the Sunshine State.

The FBT Retreat gave all people with a vested interest in transportation the opportunity to mix, mingle and learn what the future might hold for transportation in this election year.

