

FLORIDIANS FOR BETTER



TRANSPORTATION

Federal Update – June 4, 2004

House Names Conferees

On June 2nd, House Speaker Dennis Hastert appointed conferees to represent the House in the “conference” negotiations with the Senate to resolve the differences between the TEA-21 reauthorization bills passed earlier this year. Three Floridians have been named to serve on the Conference Committee – Senator Bob Graham, Congressman John Mica and Congresswoman Corrine Brown. The first official House/Senate conferee meeting is tentatively planned for Wednesday, June 9th.

Donor State Representation

In a key development, Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-TX), the House's leading advocate for donor state equity, was named to the conference committee with jurisdictional responsibility over the entire House bill. It is also important to note that 32 of the 49 House conference committee members are from "Donor" states like Florida. Of the 21 Senate conferees named, 12 come from Donor states.

Another Extension?

Once formal negotiations get underway, one of the first orders of business may be how to deal with another extension for the highway and transit programs past the current June 30 deadline. Some Members of Congress have hinted that the next extension should run through the end of the current Fiscal Year (September 30th) which would allow House/Senate conferees adequate time to craft a final reauthorization bill. However, there is also a feeling in Congress that it may be worthwhile to extend the highway and transit program through the end of July in hopes of keeping pressure on Conferees to complete action on a final bill.

The Basics

Remember, the Senate's bill provides \$318 billion and every state, including Florida, eventually reaches a minimum guarantee of a 95.0% rate-of-return against 93% of highway funds. The House bill is at \$275 billion and keeps states at a minimum guarantee of a 90.5% rate-of-return against only 84% of highway funds. The Bush Administration continues to threaten a veto of any bill over \$256 billion.

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