

Congressional Leaders Vow to Fight Highway Funding Cuts

- **MTA Would Lose Millions**

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Feb. 13, 2002) Congressional leaders of both parties took action, Tuesday, to fight a proposal by the Bush Administration to slash federal highway spending by 28 percent in the next fiscal year – a move that would severely impact the MTA.

If the proposed \$8.2 billion in cuts are approved, California could lose \$620 million in federal transportation funding. The MTA's potential losses are estimated at \$125 million to \$135 million and would affect several important local transit projects.

On Tuesday, members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and Senate Banking Committee introduced identical, bi-partisan bills seeking to avoid the proposed cuts in transportation funding.

Senior lawmakers called the proposed cutbacks unwise during a national recession and unthinkable in an election year. Both California and Texas would lose more than \$600 million each, while New York would lose more than \$345 million.

Downturn in revenues

At the heart of the federal transportation program cutbacks is a downturn in revenues from the 18.4-cent per gallon federal gasoline tax. Highway driving and airline flights are both down significantly due to the recession and the effects of the Sept. 11 attacks.

CEO Roger Snoble flew to Washington, D.C., Monday, for two days of meetings with congressional leaders and the area's delegation, as well as FTA Administrator Jenna Dorn. The administration's proposed cutbacks are expected to come up during discussions.

MTA programs that could feel the pinch include expansion of the Metro Rapid bus system, Pasadena Gold Line startup operations, access services for the disabled, signal synchronization and freeway and surface street improvements.

The MTA plans to spend \$22.3 million on the Metro Rapid bus program this year and another \$12.5 million in FY-2003, which begins July 1, 2002. The agency also plans to use \$28 million in federal funds in FY-2005 for the Pasadena Gold Line startup.

Loss would be devastating

Commenting on the possibility of losing as much as \$135 million from the MTA's \$2.7 billion budget, MTA Chairman John Fasana told the Los Angeles *Daily News*, "The loss of that amount of money would be devastating...But we hope to work with Congress to see if there are fundings options to continue those projects and services."

Snoble's trip to the capital comes on the heels of a Feb. 5 letter from Gov. Gray Davis urging the President to "identify options aimed at maintaining or increasing funding...."

Davis' letter noted that California could see a loss of \$620 million from

last year's federal transportation funding, "...a staggering figure that exceeds that of any other state." Such a loss, he wrote, would harm the economy of the United States, as well as that of California.

Also among those that would be hard-hit by federal funding cutbacks is the Bay Area, which could lose \$140 million. That loss would jeopardize completion of a major BART extension and several highway projects.

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