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Congressional Committees Boost Chance for 'Subway to the Sea'

- Also vote funding for Eastside Extension, but bills differ in amounts

(July 13, 2007) Congressional committees took action this week that brings Los Angeles another step closer to construction of the so-called "subway to the sea."

House and Senate appropriations committees passed FY 2008 transportation spending bills that include language lifting a 21-year-old prohibition against extending subway tunnels west of Wilshire/Western.

Although the Metro Board has not approved the proposed 13.2-mile extension project, at it's June meeting it did award a \$3.7 million contract to study various alternatives. The staff is currently updating the Long Range Transportation Plan and will present it to the Board later this summer.

In a statement released Wednesday, Board Chair Pam O'Connor said, "Repeal of this language represents a huge step for transit service in Los Angeles County as we begin planning for the future to improve the mobility of the region."

The action by the House and Senate appropriations committees also includes funding for the Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension, although the measures differ in the amount of funding to be provided.

The bill adopted by the House Appropriations Committee includes \$80 million for the Eastside Extension and more than \$16 million in "small starts" funding to help expand the Metro Rapid system. The action by the Senate Appropriations Committee includes only \$70 million for the Eastside Extension and did not include the \$16 million earmark for "small starts" funding.

Metro's Government Relations staff will work to ensure the agency's projects receive the full funding when the House and Senate committees meet later this year to reconcile their spending bills.

The appropriations measure will require approval by the full House and Senate, as well as President Bush's signature, before becoming law.

Congressman Henry Waxman introduced the original language restricting federal funding for subway tunneling on the Westside in 1986 following a devastating March 1985 explosion and fire in a Ross Dress for Less store on Third Street in the Wilshire-Fairfax District.

In 2005, a panel of tunneling experts selected by APTA and approved by Waxman concluded that tunneling along Wilshire and operation of subway trains west of Western Avenue could be done safely using new

tunneling technology.

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