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Colorado's U.S. Reps Join Fight to Keep Federal Funds

The Colorado Independent – September 28, 2009

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Six of Colorado's seven U.S. representatives have joined the efforts to stop the federal government from taking back more than \$100 million in transportation funds, which represents nearly 25 percent of the state's federal economic stimulus money. If Congress fails to suspend the provision in the 2005 SAFTEEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, and Transportation Equity Act: a Legacy for Users), Colorado and the other 49 states will be forced to pay back \$8.7 billion, which was set to expire Sept. 30,

The multi-billion "rescission" was written into the law so the funding act would fit under 2005 budget limits. The six Colorado representatives signed onto a letter last week, sent to House leaders and members of the transportation committee asking for support to repeal the section in SAFTEEA-LU authorizing the rescission. The lawmakers noted that Colorado has sent back \$214 million in "highway contract authority" since the 2005 fiscal year.

According to the letter, "most states have very few unobligated dollars remaining. This means that an additional \$8.7 billion rescission will result in substantial, real program cuts, not merely a reduction of unused dollars on the books."

While the Senate has favored an 18-month extension, some members are now supporting the three-month extension to force a faster turn-around for a new federal transportation infrastructure law.





budget practices. Nevertheless, it is now causing consternation among the states. Congress failed to address this issue with the extension passed on the 30th. Ultimately, it is symptomatic of the fact that our system of transportation finance is broken beyond repair. TW

FDOT Extends Deadline for Port of Miami Tunnel

South Florida Business Journal – September 29, 2009

Florida - The Port of Miami tunnel project appears to be back on track after the Florida Department of Transportation agreed to extend the deadline by at least eight days; allowing the city of Miami to confirm its funding agreement. The tunnel, from the port to MacArthur Causeway, is estimated to cost at least \$610 million.

State officials said they would wait until Oct. 8, or possibly a little longer, for Miami to deliver a \$50 million letter of credit, which the state had previously hoped to receive by Friday, September 25 to meet the original financial closing deadline for the joint state-city-county private partnership of Oct. 1.

"They resolved this to the point where we got an extension," said Helena Poleo, spokesperson for Miami Mayor Manny Diaz. "Everyone seems to be in good faith and working to complete this." The city commission is scheduled to meet Oct. 8 to approve the letter of credit, although the extension may go longer because the city has no plans to call a special meeting to approve the letter before that date, Poleo said.

The extension comes as a relief to Miami officials after they received several strongly worded letters last week saying the city's failure to deliver the \$50 million letter of credit had "jeopardized this important project" and was possibly "evidence that it does not support the project."

Highway Advocates Push \$10B Transportation Plan

Lawrence Journal-World – September 28, 2009

TOPEKA – Highway advocates in Kansas began a push this week for a new transportation plan that could cost more than \$10 billion and would require an increase to the state fuel tax. Advocates joined state officials at the Senate chamber to discuss the state's transportation needs for the next ten years.

"We can't afford, in my opinion, to allow the progress that has been made, to deteriorate," said Mary Turkington, who is co-chair of Economic Lifelines, a coalition of businesses that supports increased highway funding. The special interest groups cited a recent report by Washington, D.C. highway advocacy group TRIP (The Transportation Information Project), which said Kansas is facing a \$6.4 billion funding gap over the next decade to cover transportation projects.

The state's 10-year, \$13 billion transportation plan approved in 1999 expired earlier this year. Senate President Steve Morris vowed to push for a new transportation plan when the Legislature

begins the 2010 session in January. He said that while a general tax increase is unlikely, the Legislature would possibly be considering increasing user fees such as vehicle registration and motor fuels tax, which is currently 24 cents per gallon.

Connecticut Gov. Vetoes Effort to Hike DMV Fees

Land Line Magazine – September 28, 2009

Connecticut - A bill to boost more than 70 motor vehicle fees has been vetoed by Connecticut's Republican Governor M. Jodi Rell. The state's Democratic-controlled legislature approved the effort to raise fees by \$60 million over the next two years, combined with \$10 million in reductions to other licenses and fees for a net increase of \$50 million.

Rell said she will not support DMV increases, which would have risen Jan. 1. She said she was also concerned that the legislature would push for fee increases less than 30 days after they passed a two-year \$37.6 billion budget that contained \$1 billion in taxes and fee hikes. The budget was implemented Sept. 6 without the governor's signature.

Democrats criticized the governor's opposition, saying she proposed raising the same DMV fees a few months ago. Rell said the newly proposed fee increases should have been compensated for by other cuts in the budget instead. The lawmakers said the increases would have prevented future hikes to statewide bus and rail fees.

Work on Caldecott Tunnel could begin by Year's End

KTVU.com - September 28, 2009

BERKELEY, Calif. – The long-delayed Caldecott Tunnel improvement project is finally on a set schedule, as California Department of Transportation officials will begin evaluating bids for construction of the fourth bore, which could be underway by the end of the year.

Caltrans spokesman Jeff Weiss said construction on the \$420 million project is scheduled to start in December or January, and be completed in 2014. The first public meeting for the fourth bore took place in 1992, he said. The current configuration has three bores, or tunnel shafts running between Oakland and Contra Costa County beneath Berkeley Hills via state Highway 24. The central bore alternates between carrying eastbound and westbound traffic, and the highway narrows from eight lanes to six at the tunnel, which causes numerous fender-benders, Weiss said.

"This is one of those projects almost everyone wants," Weiss said. "Especially people living in central Contra Costa County who commute through the tunnel to the western cities of the Bay Area."

The addition of a two-lane, 3,390-foot bore will "balance the freeway," eliminating lane reductions and tunnel reversals, according to Weiss. The Bay Area has changed quite a bit since the third bore was added to the tunnel's original 1937 configuration. "Now the Bay Area is quite crowded and it's much more difficult to build a large-scale transit project," said Weiss.

Transit Workers Rally in MTA Wage Fight

New York Daily News – September 29, 2009

NEW YORK – Transit workers rallied Tuesday at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's midtown headquarters demanding the agency honor an arbitration award that would raise workers' pay rates by more than 11% over three years. MTA officials blasted the award by the jointly formed arbitration panel as too costly. The contract drafted by the panel – formed after transit and union leaders were unable to negotiate a contract last year – was to be considered final.

The MTA has since gone to court in an attempt to void the three-year contract signed on Aug. 11, requesting a judge to nullify the deal because the panel made legal and factual errors during their deliberation.

Transit workers have kept a low profile since the Transport Workers Union Local 100 staged a crippling strike in 2005 that halted subways and buses over a wage fight with the MTA. The strike resulted in stiff fines for the union. Union leaders are planning a system wide "day of outrage" for October 14, to "Give them a taste of hell," according to the TWU Local 100's website to protest the MTA's efforts to void the arbitration award.

Light-Rail Plans Prove Costly for Kansas City

The Kansas City Star – September 29, 2009

Missouri – Kansas City has been trying since 1993 to become a transit-oriented city, with attempts at various kinds of rail transportation that have cost nearly \$17 million, primarily in federal funding.

The most recent attempt comes as the city seeks \$6 million in federal stimulus funding to develop a 2.5-mile streetcar route from River Market to Crown Center. The Mid-America Regional Council is reconsidering running commuter trains on Missouri freight tracks, and light-rail advocate Clay Chastain has vowed to kick off a new light-rail campaign in October.

Rail advocates say numerous studies performed across the region have moved them closer to understanding the importance of rail transportation, and planners say the studies are a critical first step for any big-ticket infrastructure project to be eligible for federal funding.

"It takes a lot of effort and expense to get to construction," said Mark Huffer, a general manager of the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority. The biggest hurdle Kansas City rail advocates must overcome is voter-approval which has shot down the majority of past transit efforts.

NJ Loses Millions to Toll Evasion

The Associated Press – September 29, 2009
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WOODBIDGE, N.J. – The New Jersey Turnpike Authority has lost \$13.6 million to toll evaders over the past year on the turnpike and Garden State Parkway. A limo driver from Bayonne drove through toll booths a staggering 2,890 times without paying, racking up \$91,600 in tolls and fees, and was arrested in August.

The Turnpike Authority issues \$25 fines for toll evasion, but the \$15.2 million in fines issued over the past 12 months all goes to the company that processes toll violations. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey has recently announced plans to raise E-ZPass violations for New Jersey-to-New York crossings from \$25 to \$50 on Nov. 15.

New Jersey officials report that the rate of uncollected tolls in the state is 1.8 percent, compared to the national average of 2.2 percent. The worst offenders, such as the Bayonne limo driver, are referred to the State Police for prosecution.

There were 700 million paid toll transactions between August 2008 and July 2009 on the Turnpike and Parkway, one of the most heavily trafficked roads in the nation.



Evasion is a continuing problem no matter the revenue stream. To avoid evasion of motor fuel taxes we alternately move from taxing at the pump to the rack and vice versa. Off-road exemptions for construction and agriculture are also opportunities for evasion. People who don't register their cars in their state of residence to avoid vehicle license taxes are a problem in some jurisdictions. Others purchase cars from private parties and don't re-register them until the tags expire. Ultimately, we just can't afford to lose any level of revenue through these evasion practices. TW