

Stimulus Legislation Infrastructure and Texas

The United States Congress is considering an unprecedented economic stimulus package

ACCOUNTABILITY IS KEY.

It is important to explain to taxpayers in clear detail just how the money is spent and what states have accomplished with stimulus dollars.

TEXAS WILL BE READY.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and toll authorities right now are determining major priorities that can move fast, create jobs now as well as maintain jobs once construction is finished. TxDOT is dedicating staff to streamlining internal approval processes to move projects along quickly and to assist regional partners. We will be back to show you what those are.

HOW CAN CONGRESS HELP?

A lasting impact can occur if some simple changes are allowed, such as:

- **Keep the door open on longer term projects.** Provide all state departments of transportation an opportunity to use some portion of stimulus dollars on long-term projects based on meaningful criteria, such as regional economic opportunity, congestion relief, increased safety, job creation and environmental stewardship. For example, by placing a two-year completion deadline on projects receiving stimulus money, vital transportation projects in a region might not qualify for stimulus money. While we understand the purpose of the stimulus is to create jobs, we believe strongly that projects should not just provide an immediate influx of jobs, but also a long-term sustainable situation.
- **Restart the TIFIA program.** Congress can support the construction of large public works projects in many states and strengthen the capital markets by providing for secure, long term investments. One way to accomplish this is to enact a number of procedural changes and provide additional capacity for the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) Program. By incorporating some straightforward changes, projects using TIFIA funding will be more attractive to investors, ensuring work continues despite a tight credit market.
- **Eliminate future rescissions.** Congress must eliminate the pending \$8.5 billion rescission of contract authority required in SAFETEA-LU. If stimulus dollars are followed by further reductions. Texas' share of the pending rescission is approximately \$729 million. Texas has already relinquished \$924 million back to the federal government and the upcoming cut will push us past \$1.6 billion.
- **Accelerate approvals.** Projects that use stimulus funding should take on an "emergency" status component that fast tracks project development. A pre-defined emergency stimulus delivery methodology written directly into the legislation could streamline certain project development activities up front and allow immediate construction. Recent examples of the United States Department of Transportation streamlining the environmental process to deliver emergency projects include the I-35 Minneapolis

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bridge reconstruction and the Queen Isabella Causeway in South Texas. These projects were delivered quickly, safely and under budget while respecting the environment and the laws that protect it. We need this same authority in an economic emergency.

- ***Flexibility.*** We strongly encourage a maximum amount of flexibility be afforded to states for the use of any authorized funds to address our most pressing transportation needs. Sending funds uncommitted to specific projects will help us put the money to work in the fastest possible manner. In addition, we would request the ability to use some of the funds to prepare engineering and environmental on future projects in anticipation of a new surface transportation bill later in the year and employ an additional segment of the workforce.
- ***Provide funding without strings attached.*** There should be no new rules, regulations, or procedures that will slow the flow of this money. We believe that stimulus monies should not come to states through the existing myriad of federal funding categories. States and their regional partners are in the best position to determine where and how these monies may best be used to address critical transportation infrastructure and to put Americans to work.

