

## ***NEWS FROM CONGRESSMAN SAM FARR - 17<sup>th</sup> Congressional District***

July 29, 2005 - CONTACT: Jessica Schafer, 202-225-2861, [jessica.schafer@mail.house.gov](mailto:jessica.schafer@mail.house.gov)

# **HIGHWAY BILL PASSES CONGRESS AFTER YEARS OF DELAY**

### ***Bill includes \$19 million for Central Coast***

Washington, D.C. - After a long-running effort to reauthorize federal highway and mass transit programs, the House today passed a final version of the so-called "highway bill." The Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (TEA-LU), unfinished business from 2003, will provide communities across the country with funds to address their transportation needs through 2009.

Congressman Sam Farr (CA-17) secured \$14.3 million specifically for Central Coast projects within TEA-LU. Coupled with funds secured by California Sen. Barbara Boxer, Central Coast projects will receive more than \$19 million. Funds from this long-term authorization bill usually go to local transportation initiatives that have been prioritized by the local regional transportation authority.

"TEA-LU has been a long fight, but it is critical legislation that will help modernize our aging transportation infrastructure. Though the majority rushed this final version of the bill through at the last moment before the August recess, I'm glad we are finally sending TEA-LU to the president," said Farr. "Central Coast commuters, agricultural businesses, and visitors will all benefit directly from funds to ease congestion and improve safety on our local roadways."

Farr secured funds for:

- The Airport Blvd. Interchange in Salinas
- The Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail
- Highway 1 Improvements, Santa Cruz County
- Highway 25 Improvements, San Benito County
- Bus equipment for Monterey-Salinas Transit

Farr also established a new formula funding program for smaller transit agencies with high usage and secured rail authorization for Monterey County Passenger Rail.

The long debate over TEA-LU began with the expiration of the 1998 highway bill (TEA-21) on September 30, 2003. During the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, both the House and Senate approved highway bills, but negotiators seeking to reconcile the two versions of the bill were unable to reach agreement. With House passage, the Senate is expected to pass TEA-LU later today and then send the bill to the president for his signature.

**Further details of the Central Coast projects Congressman Farr included in TEA-LU, as well as quotes from regional transportation authorities, follow:**

**High Intensity, Small Urbanized Area Formula Grant Program: New Formula Grant Program**

Farr negotiated language in TEA-LU to establish the "High Intensity Small Urbanized Area Formula Grant Program", designed to help smaller transit programs with unusually high usage. The current formula for federal transit funds to small urbanized areas is based on population, not service levels. This program will provide additional capital funds to smaller agencies that exceed the average service levels of their larger counterparts. Guidelines for the program are based on a 2000 Federal Transit Administration study that developed six statistical qualifications to identify communities that are "transit intensive." Both Santa Cruz METRO and Monterey Salinas Transit meet all the qualifications. With the passage of TEA-LU, this Intensity Tier program will be a permanent program.

"Metro is extremely pleased that the creation of the transit Intensity Tier was included in the final version of the transportation bill and we are very grateful to Congressman Farr for his leadership and tireless promotion of the concept. The program will reward communities such as ours that have shown a strong commitment to transit but lack the federal assistance for capital projects that our larger counterparts enjoy. The Intensity Tier gives us greater flexibility to pursue projects such as renewing our bus fleet and the construction of MetroBase and will be of great benefit to the area," **said Mike Keogh, Santa Cruz METRO Chair.**

**Airport Blvd. Interchange, Salinas: \$6.936 million**

Boosted by \$5 million in funds negotiated by Sen. Boxer, this critical project will receive nearly \$7 million. The Airport Blvd. interchange links U.S. 101 to the truck shipping terminals that the Salinas Valley agriculture industry depends on to export much of their produce to North America and the world. This funding will go to updating the interchange's 40 year old design so that it can efficiently handle the over 2,700 trucks that use the interchange *daily* during the spring to fall agricultural season.

"With such critical transportation needs in Monterey County, we are thrilled that Congressman Farr and our congressional delegation were able to assist with funding for the Airport Boulevard Interchange. This project will address the bottleneck created by 2,700 trucks a day moving produce to national and international markets," **said Jyl Lutes, Salinas Council Member and Transportation Agency for Monterey County Board Member.**

"In addition to this welcome infusion of federal funding for this key highway project, congressional approval of TAMC's two rail projects will allow the projects to become eligible for additional federal funding. One rail project will provide the Monterey Peninsula with fixed guide way service along the existing Monterey Branch Line and the other rail project will extend Caltrain commuter rail service from San Francisco and San Jose from Gilroy to Pajaro, Castroville and Salinas along the coast main line. Rail service will help take residents to their jobs and bring tourists into the County, without adding to our highway congestion," she continued.

### **Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail: \$5.8 million**

This funding will be to connect segments of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail. When completely linked, the 50-mile long route will enable visitors to explore and enjoy the coastline of Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties, while respecting residential, agricultural, and environmentally sensitive surroundings along the way.

"The Scenic Trail project will boost our local tourism industry by establishing a continuous bike and pedestrian trail around the Monterey Bay where visitors and residents can experience nature's best meeting of land and sea," said Farr.

### **Highway 1 Improvements, Santa Cruz County: \$2.9 million**

Highway 1 links the cities of Watsonville, Aptos and Santa Cruz in Santa Cruz County. This funding will be used to add improvements between Soquel and Morrissey Blvd. including merge lanes and the La Fonda overpass.

"We are very appreciative that Congressman Farr has taken an active role in seeking workable solutions for our area's transportation problems. The Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail and the Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lanes Project are cost-effective ways to ease burdensome traffic congestion in the area while also providing improved mobility for bicyclists and pedestrians and emergency vehicles," said **Ellen Pirie, Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Committee Chair**.

### **Improvements to Highway 25, San Benito County: \$2.8 million**

In the past three years there have been 20 tragic fatalities along the 12.5 mile segment of Highway 25 closest to Hollister. This funding will go toward much needed safety improvements for this roadway.

### **Bus equipment for Monterey-Salinas Transit: \$800,000**

Funding to help Monterey-Salinas Transit purchase new buses so they can maintain existing transit services to the community, serve the redeveloped Fort Ord area, and meet mandated improvements in engine emissions.

"Without a dedicated local source of funding for transit, MST relies on federal funding for both operating and capital projects. So, MST appreciates the efforts made on its behalf by Congressman Farr to bring sorely needed transit funding to our region," said **MST Board Chair Fernando Armenta**. "This will directly support our ability to provide reliable and efficient transit service, and Congressman Farr was instrumental in obtaining this Federal funding. His continual support for our needs has been outstanding."

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