

MINUTES
SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION, TECHNOLOGY
AND LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION
March 12, 2014

The Senate Committee on Transportation, Technology and Legislative Affairs and the House Committee on Public Transportation met Wednesday, March 12, 2014, at 1:30 p.m., in Room B, MAC, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Committee members in attendance: *Senators* Bill Sample, Chair; David Wyatt, Vice Chair; Linda Chesterfield, Jimmy Hickey, and Bobby Pierce; *Representatives* Jonathan Barnett, Chair; Walls McCrary, Vice Chair; Charles Armstrong, Dan M. Douglas, David Fielding, Mike Holcomb, George McGill, Terry Rice, and Frederick Smith.

Other legislators in attendance: Senator Bruch Maloch; Representatives Harold Copenhaver, and Joe Jett.

Representative Barnett called the meeting to order.

Consideration to Approve Minutes of February 25, 2014 [Exhibit B]

Upon motion of Senator Sample and a second by Representative Douglas, the minutes were approved.

Representative Barnett recognized the following persons for presentations to the committees: Executive Director Chris Brown, Ark-Tex Council of Governments; Commissioner Tom Whitten, Bowie County, Texas; Council member Tim Campbell, Garland Texas; Council member Debby Bobbitt, Rowlett, Texas; and public policy consultants Russell Schaffner and Matt Brasso, Dean International, Inc.

TEX-21 Interstate 30 Corridor Coalition

Chris Brown described TEX-21 as a 1999 grassroots multi-state coalition with cities and counties seeking comprehensive solutions to transportation challenges. The coalition now includes transit and port authorities, international trade corridors, universities, and industry leaders encompassing 60% of the population of Texas with growing support in Arkansas and Oklahoma. Mr. Brown said it is important to begin discussions on Interstate 30 (I-30) which connects Texas and Arkansas. I-30 is now one of the preeminent corridors in the U.S. for the movement of freight, which will continue to accelerate with the expansion of the Panama Canal.

Mr. Brown stated the TEX-21 I-30 Corridor Task Force has entered into discussions with every city and county along the corridor. The current problem is the dramatic increase in truck traffic. He described 2007 information from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) depicting long haul freight traffic traveling through Texas to the northeast along I-35 to I-30. FHWA projection for travel in 2040 along the same route shows significant increases in traffic. The task force hopes to avoid heavy congestion on I-30. There is concern that future traffic will bypass Arkansas and travel along I-20 through Louisiana if I-30 is not developed. Coalition members learned there is no push for transportation funding. TEX-21 is building support and a grassroots foundation to provide the legislature the backing it needs to appropriate funding for transportation. TEX-21 has a working plan and wants Arkansas to participate.

Panama Canal

Tom Whitten gave a history of the Panama Canal, which currently serves an average of 35-40 vessels daily. Container ships have outgrown the canal with approximately 75% of the world's cargo and container ships

too large to use the canal. An increase in capacity for freight on the canal will require numerous freight routes. Mr. Whitten stated the relevance of the Panama Canal for Texas and Arkansas is its location.

Mr. Campbell discussed what expansion of the canal will mean for freight transportation and cited Garland, Texas, as the entry point for I-30 into Dallas County. He described the capacity of the large freight ships used worldwide compared to the ships currently using the canal. Following expansion of the canal, the new locks will be 400 feet longer, 70 feet wider and 18 feet deeper, an increase of 48%. Mr. Whitten stated the cost to ship one container 1,664 miles by rail from Los Angeles to Little Rock is \$3,200. Shipping freight by large cargo ships is \$1,000 less per container. Mr. Campbell discussed infrastructure needed to accommodate the larger ships. Unloading one ship will require 35½-mile long trains meaning substantial space will be required. Currently, ports in Long Beach and Los Angeles handle 49% of all imports into the U.S. with more infrastructure needed going north and south.

There was discussion regarding the impact expansion of the canal is having on Panama. There are 90 international banks, numerous 40-50 foot story skyscrapers, and over 3,000 shipping companies opening. Many transportation experts and interested parties will travel to Panama in August to explore the expansion efforts.

TEX-21 Third Coast Initiative

Ms. Debby Bobbitt discussed the TEX-21 Third Coast Initiative, its vision and priorities in preparation for the expansion of the Panama Canal. The Texas Gulf coast can become an import and export hub by readying ports and providing infrastructure for the increased freight anticipated upon completion of the Panama Canal expansion. A Texas coast would be an important third coast as a major importer and exporter of goods. There are no ports in Texas deeper than 50 feet and none ready to dock large ships. Infrastructure will be vital to maximize success of the canal expansion and the effect it will have on the central region of the U.S. Infrastructure readiness will need to include port preparedness, coordination of operators at terminals, railroads, state and local planning agencies, trucking companies, inland ports and distribution centers.

The Wright Amendment

Ms. Bobbitt discussed commuter air travel and the impact of the Wright Amendment. This amendment was passed shortly after creation of the Dallas Fort Worth (DFW) airport and deregulation of the airlines. When Southwest Airlines (SWA) began service, it was located at Dallas Love Field. SWA filed suit to remain at the airport to retain its customers. The Wright Amendment restricted passenger travel from Love Field to the surrounding states of Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma and New Mexico. Congress repealed the amendment in 2006. Changes, which will occur with the repeal of the amendment, will take effect in October 2014. These changes will cause in-state air travel to Love Field to dissolve as airlines are allowed to provide non-stop flights outside the surrounding states. Ms. Bobbitt stated that Texas and the surrounding states should prepare for this major shift in commuter air travel.

High Speed Rail

Ms. Bobbitt discussed the importance of High Speed Rail (HSR) as an option to provide commuter travel. HSR can prove to be more profitable in providing services to shorter distances. It supports local businesses while complimenting long haul services and major hubs. The benefits of HSR are seen in technology that can revolutionize how business is conducted as evidenced in other parts of the world. A commute from Madrid to Barcelona in Spain, the busiest route in the world in 2006 with 971 flights per week, was reduced by 12% after only one year of HSR.

Mr. Campbell continued the discussion on HSR and the I-30 corridor as well as the mission and vision of the I-30 Corridor Task Force. The U.S. Department of Transportation has created a vision for HSR in the U.S. that includes a designated HSR corridor from Dallas to Little Rock along I-30. This type of system would be extremely important as a link for the entire south central region. Standards of precision for HSR has many differences from regular train travel and is aimed at having high speeds over a significant distance with time to speed up and slow down. It cannot interface with other traffic and will have to be either overhead or underground.

Mr. Brown stated a group from Monterey, Mexico, has expressed interest in bringing HSR to San Antonio, Texas, which is important, as these endeavors will largely be private investments. The states are not seeking to subsidize, but helping to prepare and lay the groundwork, such as environmental clearance and identification of right-of-way. The task force is building networks to increase avenues to seek funding. Task force members have been meeting quarterly with Victor Mendez, former FHWA director and Acting Deputy Secretary for the U.S. Department of Transportation.

MAP-21 (FHWA Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act)

Mr. Schaffner briefly discussed Map-21, reauthorization of the current Federal Surface Transportation Bill. Within Map-21 is a program just beginning known as the National Freight Network. Mr. Schaffner said that I-30 is part of the program and deemed a high priority corridor on the national highway system in 2006.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.