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U.S. government awaits effects of stimulus bill

Wed Apr 29, 2009 11:25pm BST
By [Lisa Lambert](#)

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - In the past 10 weeks, the U.S. government has allocated billions of dollars for transportation projects under a plan to revive the languishing economy, but the effects of the historic effort may not be seen for months, the Transportation Secretary said on Wednesday.

Of the \$48.1 billion the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act gave to the Department of Transportation to invest immediately, some \$44.8 billion has already been made available to state and local agencies, said Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. Some \$8 billion of that has been granted to specific projects in 48 U.S. states and territories "and the figures are increasing every day," he told a hearing at the House of Representatives.

"Our part of the recovery ... will help jump-start the economy," LaHood said to reporters during a recess at the Transportation Committee's hearing on the progress of the stimulus. I think as soon as the weather breaks and as soon as these contracts are (signed), you're going to see thousands of people all over America working in good-paying jobs," he added.

Since transportation projects involve construction work outdoors, some agencies have not been able to begin repaving roads and bolstering bridges in the winter weather. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson also testified that of the \$7.22 billion the recovery bill granted for the agency's specific programs over the next two

years, the EPA has already distributed \$1.5 billion to 49 states, the District of Columbia and American Samoa. Of the \$1.2 billion which Jackson called "discretionary," and not being funneled through established programs, "very little of that is on the street right now ... we're dealing with a few upfront issues which have slowed us down just a bit," she said, but did not elaborate on the obstacles. A recent government report found states are having trouble tracking how many jobs the recovery bill has created.

The Transportation Committee's highest ranking Republican John Mica called for finding a way to determine the number of jobs created as the stimulus bill's intent was to generate jobs. LaHood acknowledged that "it's been difficult and we're very close to defining what a job is." The Transportation Department's Inspector General Calvin Scovel pointed to another issue, warning the department may not have enough personnel to put the mammoth money infusion to use.

"Department of Transportation officials expressed concerns about their ability to provide sufficient oversight with limited time and staff, particularly in regional and division offices," he said. Both Oberstar and LaHood said the stimulus would serve as a model for the surface transportation bill the U.S. Congress will debate this summer and will dictate how roads, public transit and bridge projects are funded over the next five years.

Obama will soon give Congress general principles he wants in the legislation, LaHood told reporters, but will likely not put a dollar amount on the bill or demand specifics. See web link at: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/gc06/idUKTRE53S8UD20090429>

OOIDA members' phone calls about 'Jason's law' prompt action in DC

By Clarissa Kell-Holland, staff writer

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Since receiving a Call to Action last week about federal legislation titled "Jason's Law" for safe truck parking, the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association (OOIDA members) have been tirelessly pounding the phones to their lawmakers in Washington, DC.

Their efforts have not gone unnoticed. After receiving "tons of calls" from OOIDA members to support HR2156 for safe and secure truck parking, Rep. David Obey, D-WI, signed on as a co-sponsor to the bill.

Late Tuesday, Rep. Paul Tonko, D-NY, introduced the bill, which seeks \$120 million for a six-year pilot program to address truck parking concerns nationwide. Click [here](#) to read Tonko's bill. A total of nine lawmakers have signed on as co-sponsors so far.

Besides issuing a Call to Action on Wednesday, OOIDA President Jim Johnston sent a letter of support to Tonko on "behalf of America's small-business trucking professionals." Click [here](#) to read Johnston's letter.

"Every day the nationwide shortage of safe and secure truck parking threatens the well-being of Americans who make their living behind the wheel of commercial vehicles," Johnston wrote in the letter. "If drivers are unable to find parking for their trucks, they will be forced to either operate illegally and unsafely or park their vehicles illegally and unsafely."

OOIDA Director of Government Affairs Rod Nofziger said while the Association is "reaching out directly to lawmakers to ask them to support Jason's Law," OOIDA is also being contacted by lawmakers' offices who are receiving "plenty of calls from truckers about the bill."

Click [here](#) to read OOIDA's Call to Action on Jason's Law, named for slain New York trucker Jason Rivenburg, who was fatally shot on March 5 at an abandoned gas station where he was parked. Rivenburg drove for OOIDA member Frank VanderVeen of Delanson, NY.

On average, OOIDA members drive more than 115,000 miles per year and spend more than 240 nights per year away from home. Johnston said that "Jason's law" will go a long way toward ensuring that adequate and safe truck parking is available for fatigued drivers as well as drivers seeking to comply with hours-of-service regulations.

In closing, Johnston thanked Tonko for supporting truckers in their fight for safe and secure parking. "Thank you for your leadership on this important matter. We look forward to helping you make 'Jason's law' the law of the land," he said. For additional information, please see the following web-link: http://www.landlinemag.com/todays_news/Daily/2009/Apr09/042709/043009-01.htm

Ports of L.A., Long Beach start day pass system

April 28, 2009- Tuesday was the first day for a new day-pass system to be put in place at the massive twin ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. Last week the second port of America's largest two-port complex approved a special entry pass for long-haul truckers, allowing small-business truck operations to continue making occasional port deliveries.

The Port of Long Beach approved a day-pass provision this past week, which will allow long-haulers to visit the Port of Los Angeles and Port of Long Beach complex 24 times annually. Drivers will need one pass per visit, and each pass will cost \$30.

The Port of Los Angeles adopted its part of the day pass in early April. Chris Cannon, program manager for the Clean Trucks Program at the Port of Los Angeles, said the first few hours of the new program were uneventful.

"As far as we can tell, it's been a pretty quiet start," Cannon told *Land Line*.

The new day pass requires the use of radio frequency identification, also known as RFID. Drivers can purchase the RFID systems from the marine terminals or online at myclean-trucks.com.

Drivers may use an existing RFID system if they've already purchased one through existing marine terminal systems such as Pier PASS, Port Check and Emodal.

For more information, call the port Clean Trucks Program hotline at 866-721-5686. The RFID will cost \$60 at the time of purchase, but should last for up to five years, Cannon said.

"You buy it, and then for the following 23 trips that year you can use the same tag," Cannon said. "Each time you visit you can just call up and buy a new pass and reregister the same tag.

The idea is to try and minimize the hassle of having to deal with it." Cannon said terminal officials at the ports decided the RFID systems would need to be picked up in person and not mailed to drivers. The RFIDs will be used only to track port trucks while they're on port property.

The day pass allows long-haul truckers to avoid a lengthy and expensive process to become port concessionaires as part of each port's Clean Trucks Program. The Port of Los Angeles concessionaire program requires motor carriers to pay \$2,500, in addition to \$100 per truck. By 2012, all trucks will be banned from the ports unless approved as concessionaires, an application process that includes weighting carriers by total financial assets and other considerations.

The aim of the Clean Trucks Program was cutting pollution from many drayage trucks that work mainly in the port area.

OOIDA representatives met multiple times with port officials on the day-pass agreement, urging the adoption of a day-pass system so long-haul truckers can get into the ports. "We have something in place that will maintain access for long-haul truckers," Joe Rajkovic, OOIDA regulatory affairs specialist, recently told *Land Line*. "

And in the event that the L.A. Long Beach model is implemented at other ports, this provision will hopefully maintain access at other ports so we don't have to fight those battles individually at each port."

For additional information, please see: http://www.landlinemag.com/todays_news/Daily/2009/Apr09/042709/042809-01.htm

— By Charlie Morasch, staff writer
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KCS launches service to Mexican multi-modal facility

4/29/2009 Intermodal

On April 28th, [Kansas City Southern](#) Railroad announced it has added an intermodal train service to Puerta México, a new multi-modal facility in Toluca, Mexico.

Operated by Ports America, Puerta México is located on KCS' International Intermodal Corridor and offers multi-modal, on-site customs and bonded warehousing services to ocean carriers, and intermodal and other logistics service providers. The facility — which will provide storage, cross-dock and transloading services, as well as serve as a vehicle distribution center — is adjacent to Kansas City Southern de México S.A. de C.V.'s "N" line.

Puerta México will become the "terminal of choice" for freight moving to and from the central valley, Port of Lázaro Cárdenas and a border crossing at Nuevo Laredo/Laredo, providing multi-modal shippers access to the industrial heartlands of Mexico and the United States, KCS officials said in a prepared statement.

The 130-acre facility can handle more than 150,000 containers and 2 million-plus tons of cargo annually, essentially doubling the intermodal capacity available to

the greater Mexican central valley region and alleviating congestion in the region's supply chain, they said.

Meanwhile, BNSF Logistics L.L.C. recently was named the 2008 Fixture/Construction Carrier of the Year by Wal-Mart Stores Inc. BNSF Logistics provides truckload and transportation management services to support Wal-Mart's store construction and remodeling programs.

The award recognizes a logistics provider's overall dedication to customer service, operational excellence and creative supply-chain solutions. For additional information, please see the following web-site: <http://www.progressiverailroading.com/news/article.asp?id=20282>

Truckers aren't scared of the swine flu

Forty-six percent of truckers who voted in a poll on [Land Line Magazine's website](#) say that they aren't at all worried about swine flu, having clicked on the tab that says, "It's going to take more than a germ to bring me down."

Thirty-two percent say they're "somewhat worried, but not using any more Germ-X than usual," and 22 percent admit they're "very worried" because they can't afford to take any sick days. (We checked the poll numbers at noon today; obviously they're subject to change.). Land Line Magazine is the official publication of the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association ([OOIDA](#)).

Maybe truckers aren't worried about contracting swine flu on trips through Mexico because they have a more pressing concern: avoiding getting caught in the crossfire between warring Mexican drug cartels. The most recent warning to truckers about traveling

across the Mexico border from the [Highway Information Sharing and Analysis Center](#), part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, reads, "Violence amongst Mexican drug cartels in the border states, on both sides of the US-Mexico border, has exponentially increased in the past years. More than 200 Americans have been killed in the area since 2004." For a link to this on-line article please see the following OOIDA website: <http://www.ooida.com/>

Article posted by: Nadia Pflaum in [News](#)
Date: Tuesday, Apr. 28 2009 @ 12:20PM

ANALYSIS-Clock ticking on US transportation bill

Tue Apr 28, 2009 6:57pm BST

(This report is part of a Reuters series on infrastructure)

By [Lisa Lambert](#)

WASHINGTON, April 27 (Reuters) - Legislators and the U.S. transportation industry are up against a Sept. 30 deadline to pass a massive funding law for the country's roads, bridges and public transit.

If they fail, the result would be a sharp cut in money available for transportation infrastructure projects. "I am hopeful," Pete Nonis, congressional relations manager for the American Automobile Association told Reuters. "It's going to be a tough lift."

Every five years or so, Congress passes a law that dictates how all surface transportation projects in the country will be planned, funded and completed. The current law, SAFETEA-LU frequently called the highway bill, expires on Sept. 30. It was approved in July 2005, nearly two years after the previous law expired in September 2003. Then-President George W. Bush signed extensions of the expired law 12 times to keep the country's transportation programs on track.

"If we go past the Sept. 30 deadline there will be a serious shortfall in revenues, resulting in a 50 percent cut in what we can send out to the states," said James Berard, a spokesman for the House of Representatives Transportation Committee. "That's the hammer hanging over our heads."

The committee's chairman, Minnesota Democrat James Oberstar, expects the committee to pass the bill in May so the full House can debate and vote on it in June, Berard said. "We are determined-- at least our goal is -- to get this one done within the current authorization, without having to go to an extension," Berard said.

David Parkhurst, staff director and counsel of the National Governors Association's economic and commerce committee, is guardedly optimistic that this go-around will follow a "quicker process" than the last time. "It just stalls planning and delays the ability of state and local transportation officials to make long-term plans," he said, referring to exten-

sions. "If we don't have the rules of the road in place, so to speak, it's going to be challenging to state and local governments."

Politics and process, though, could arrest Oberstar's ambition. The Senate must also pass a version of the bill, and then the two bodies will forge a compromise bill for President Barack Obama to sign into law. On the Senate side, legislation must first wend its way through two large committees, Environment and Public Works and Finance. Obama will also want to inject his objectives -- likely to include a national infrastructure bank -- into the legislation and, on top of that, Congress usually takes a month-long recess in August.

Senator Barbara Boxer, the California Democrat who chairs the Public Works Committee, has pledged to make the drafting process open and bipartisan. She has researched the bill for nearly two years, an aide said, and staff members and legislators are meeting frequently on it. Still, the aide did not want to hazard projecting when the committee will pass the bill and emphasized there has been no date set for a Senate vote. After enduring a recession for more than a year, Americans may resist a program with a large price tag, especially so soon after the \$787 billion stimulus plan boosted funding for surface transportation projects.

The highway bill expiring at the end of summer has a price tag of \$286.4 billion. Already, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials is pressing for the next bill to be \$545 billion. AAA's Nonis said bills being floated in the House range between \$100 billion and \$500 billion.

Debates about the nature of the bill could also slow its passage. In 2005, the highway bill passed with some \$200 million for Alaska's "Bridge to Nowhere" that inspired outrage across the country and legislators are under pressure to keep special funding favors out of legislation. Also, some want the bill to continue to tilt toward highways, while others would like it expanded to include the agenda launched by Obama in the recent economic stimulus plan, namely improved public transportation and high-speed rail. For additional information, please see the following website: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/motoringAutoNews/idUKN2754609820090428?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0>

February 2009 Surface Trade with Canada and Mexico Fell 30.9 Percent from February 2008

Thursday, April 30, 2009

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Trade using surface transportation between the United States and its North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) partners Canada and Mexico was 30.9 percent lower in February 2009 than in February 2008, dropping to \$47.9 billion, the biggest year-to-year percentage decline on record, according to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

February was the fourth consecutive month with a yearly decline of greater than 13 percent. During the first two months of 2009, the value of surface trade dropped 29.1 percent compared to the first two months of 2008. The value of U.S. surface transportation trade with Canada and Mexico rose 1.0 percent in February 2009 from January 2009.

Month-to-month changes can be affected by seasonal variations and other factors. Surface transportation consists largely of freight movements by truck, rail and pipeline. About 88 percent of U.S. trade by value with Canada and Mexico moves on land.

The value of U.S. surface transportation trade with Canada and Mexico in February was down 0.5 percent compared to February 2004, a period of five years, and up 24.3 percent compared to February 1999, a period of 10 years.

Imports in February were up 19.5 percent compared to February 1999, while exports were up 30.3 percent. For additional information, please see the following web-link: http://www.bts.gov/press_releases/2009/bts020_09/html/bts020_09.html

U.S. Dept of Homeland Security Supports Repealing Real ID Law

U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Janet Napolitano stated on April 22nd that the Obama administration supports repealing the REAL ID law or finding another way of implementing tighter driver's license issuance requirements.

The 2005 REAL ID Act requires states to tighten the security and immigration checks they require for issuing drivers licenses. The law came out of a conclusion from the 9/11 Commission Report that tighter licensing requirements could have prevented the attacks.

States that do not adhere to the REAL ID guidelines will be unable to issue drivers licenses that will be acceptable for entering nuclear power plants, regulated chemical facilities, federal buildings, facilities, Indian reservations or scheduled airline flights. Under the current regulations, all states have been granted extensions to upgrade their systems through Dec. 31, with further extensions possible.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has not issued guidance as to how the REAL ID Act would affect the issuance of Commercial Driver Licenses (CDLs), but many serious difficulties are foreseen in the application of the REAL ID rules to CDL

holders. The Senate Subcommittee for Oversight and Government Management has held hearings on this subject and draft legislation is circulating that would repeal the program. ATA continues to monitor the issue and will work with congressional and administration officials to ensure that any changes to drivers license requirements will not create burdens on the trucking industry.

For additional information, please see the following website: http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/04/22/real.ID.debate/index.html?eref=rss_latest

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Famous Quote of the Day:

"In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks."

--John Muir,
naturalist and author

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Information provided is a compilation from other news and on-line media sources, any information relayed is based upon the accuracy of the information provided by other news gathering organizations and does not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the Federal Highway Administration or the State of Texas Border Partnership Working Group.

Next FHWA HQ's Talking Freight Web Seminar (Wednesday, May 20, 2009)

The Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Office of Freight Management and Operations and the Office of Planning host the "Talking Freight" web seminars.

These web seminars are part of a broader Freight Professional Development Program aimed at providing technical assistance, training, tools, and information to help the freight and planning workforce meet the transportation challenges of tomorrow.

These FHWA web seminars are held on a monthly basis throughout the year and are open at no cost to all interested parties in both the public and private sectors. The next FHWA HQ's Talking Freight Seminar will be held on April 15th and will cover the topic of:

"Higher Productivity Trucks"

Higher productivity trucks are the topic of discussion with the industry as well as with those on Capitol Hill these days.

There are arguments on the side of productivity and greenhouse gas reductions.

And, there are arguments of concern related to how well our roads and bridges will hold up. Hear discussions from the experts on the contribution of higher productivity trucks as well as the issues related to safety and infrastructure.

For additional information, please see the following FHWA HOFM website for registration to sign-up for this upcoming web seminar: https://www.nhi.fhwa.dot.gov/resources/webconference/web_conf_learner_reg.aspx?webConfID=16393

AASHTO Releases "Bottom Line" Technical Report on Highway and Transit Funding Shortfalls

The American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHTO) has recently released its technical report accompanying the "Bottom Line" report. The report addresses many of the highway and public transit shortfalls affecting States and local governments. The report indicates that every authorization of the Federal-aid surface transportation legislation is difficult, but the current cycle is particularly challenging due to the multiple threats of:

- Federal Highway Trust fund solvency;
- Declining revenue bases at all levels of government;
- Dramatically higher costs of capital construction;
- Dramatically higher fuel costs;
- Prospective impacts of green house gases;
- Infrastructure reconstruction needs;

- Continuing congestion on highways;
- Overcrowding on public transportation;
- International competitiveness; and
- A weak economy.

As a next Federal-aid highway authorization Act approaches, this research has employed the capabilities of the sophisticated highway and transit-needs models of the U.S. DOT: HERS, NBIAS and TERM, with the cooperation of the FHWA and FTA, to forecast long-term capital investment requirements for highways, bridges and public transportation. The AASHTO report assembled a comprehensive review of potential future highway and transit investment scenarios that may be feasible over the next 20 years. For additional information, please see the following AASHTO web-link: <http://bottomline.transportation.org/BottomLineReport.pdf>