

State of Texas Border Partnership E-Newsletter

In this Month's Issue:

- DOT Launches \$600M infrastructure Program (p.1)
- U.S. high-speed rail's ship finally comes in (p.2)
- States make the case for building essential transportation capacity (p.3)
- NAFTA surface trade takes record jump (p.4)
- BTS releases new report "Freight Transportation— Global Highlights 2010" (p.4)
- Crude spill may threaten some Gulf oil operations (p.5)
- Panama Canal: engineering achievement, economic engine, and just plain magnificent (U.S. DOT Secretary's blog- p.5)
- U.S. DOT releases guide to programs that promote sustainable communities (p.6)
- Next Talking Freight Web Seminar on June 16th (p.7)
- U.S. trucking industry will not support a VMT tax says ATA (p.7)

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DOT launches \$600 million infrastructure program

The U.S. Department of Transportation on Monday, April 26th solicited applications from public and private entities for \$600 million worth of infrastructure grants to be awarded on a competitive basis similar to the popular TIGER discretionary grants earlier this year.

In February, the DOT awarded \$1.5 billion in transportation investment grants from the Recovery Act to 51 projects after receiving more than 1,400 applications seeking \$60 billion. Less than 3 percent of the applications, by dollar value, received any funding.

The second tranche of money for innovative, multi-jurisdictional projects of regional or national significance was modeled on the TIGER program and included in the 2010 fiscal year appropriation for the DOT and Department of Housing and Urban Development. The money can be used for highway, bridge, passenger and freight rail, public transportation, and port improvements. Grants can range in size from a minimum of \$10 million to a maximum of \$200 million. The largest grant offered under the original TIGER program was \$105 million.

Eligible applicants include states, local governments, port authorities, transit agencies and metropolitan planning organizations. The DOT said applicants increase their chances of winning if they can demonstrate significant project funding contributions from non-federal sources. Projects will be selected based on their ability to repair infrastructure to good condition, contribute to economic competitiveness, foster livability, and reduce environmental impacts.

Available money for planning purposes -- \$75 million -- will be awarded in conjunction with HUD for transportation and community planning grants as part of the Obama administra-

tion's multiagency initiative to promote sustainable communities by aligning transportation, housing, economic development and land use planning. HUD has \$40 million available for its Community Challenge Planning Grants program. The Sustainable Communities initiative attempts to encourage metropolitan planners to consider affordable housing, alternative transportation options and pollution reduction efforts.

Under the 2010 Appropriations Act, at least \$140 million in grants must be used for projects in rural areas. There was no comparable amount set aside for rural areas in the Recovery Act. The current program also differs in that it does not emphasize job creation as one of its goals and instead will exclusively focus on a project's merit.

The announcement about so-called TIGER II funding availability also includes criteria on how project winners will be selected and pre-application and application requirements. The DOT is also accepting comments about the grant process and selection criteria.

Additional information on the TIGER II grant notice can be found at: <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2010/pdf/2010-9591.pdf>

TIGER II grant dates:

- Comments must be received by May 7, 2010, at 5 p.m. EST.
- Pre-applications must be submitted by July 16, 2010, at 5 p.m. EST
- Final applications must be submitted through Grants.gov by August 23, 2010, at 5 p.m. EST

SOURCE: U.S. Dept of Transportation
DATE: 04/26/10



U.S. high-speed rail's ship finally comes in

Like the gleam on the tracks from an oncoming locomotive, high-speed rail transportation in the United States may be finally coming into sight. Before the end of the decade, rail backers promise, Americans will be traveling on bullet trains, the way Europeans and Asians have been doing for half a century. At speeds of up to 220 mph, high-speed rail will make it possible to travel from Los Angeles to San Francisco in less than three hours, or half the time it takes to drive. Tampa to Orlando will take less than an hour, or 35 percent faster than by car. You'll be able to get from Chicago to St. Louis in less time than it takes to fly -- after you factor in the hours spent getting to and from distant airports and the hassle of getting through security 90 minutes before your flight.

The myriad benefits of high-speed rail have long been apparent to anyone who has ridden Japan's Shinkansen trains or France's TGV. These so-called bullet trains are faster than driving, more comfortable and convenient for short distances than flying and, because they run on electricity, don't rely on foreign oil imports. Trains arrive in downtown city centers and are usually linked to public transit.

"High-speed trains consume less fuel, produce less carbon dioxide, and promote urban redevelopment, which has broader environmental benefits," said Kevin Brubaker, deputy director of the Environmental Law & Policy Center in Chicago, which has worked to build civic support throughout the Midwest for investment in rail transportation. "We see high-speed rail as a way to improve mobility while improving the environment." Perhaps the chief obstacle standing in high-speed rail's way has been a lack of support from the White House. That changed when President Obama took office in 2009 and promised to make high-speed rail a legacy of his administration, much as the Interstate Highway System was for Dwight D. Eisenhower's. And the \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (a.k.a. the stimulus) provided the perfect opportunity for the administration's plan to garner bipartisan support.

Rail infrastructure improvements are exactly the kind of "shovel-ready" projects the stimulus was designed to underwrite in hundreds of congressional districts across the country, creating or saving tens of thousands of high-paying skilled jobs in construction, manufacturing and engineering that can't be exported overseas. The administration says that more than 30 rail manufacturers have agreed to establish or expand operations in the United States if they are hired to build the next generation of railroads. "There are tons of projects the railroads have had in their filing cabinets for years, but they just haven't had the money to implement," said James P. RePass, president and chief executive of the National Corridors Initiative, a nonprofit that advocates for increased rail infrastructure.

The administration requested \$8 billion in stimulus funds for rail projects, and in January it announced its first awards. The biggest grants went to Florida (\$1.25 billion), which plans to use 168 mph trains to link Orlando to Tampa by 2014 and to



Miami by 2017, and to California (\$2.34 billion), which has the nation's most ambitious and most developed plan to link its major cities by bullet train. While those awards capture the imagination with their promise of shiny new bullet trains rocketing across the two states, most of the money will be spent more mundanely, on projects to speed up conventional rail. Trains traveling at 200 mph are still a long way down the track in such places as Detroit, Seattle and Charlotte. But funding for incremental improvements to tracks, signals and rolling stock will raise average speeds on existing conventional rail lines. "If you can upgrade the places where trains can only travel 10 mph, you can knock an hour off the trip between Chicago and St. Louis," said RePass.

"The key to going fast is not going slow," added Brubaker. Even the fastest trains will never approach the efficiency of an airplane for a cross-country trip, of course. That's why the administration's plan focuses only on corridors between cities 100 to 600 miles apart. In clusters of cities such as Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati; Portland, Ore., and Seattle; or Charlotte, Richmond and Washington, rail links are expected to reduce congestion both on the highways and in the skies. The corridors will be separate from Amtrak, the nation's existing conventional rail passenger system, though Amtrak may bid competitively to build some of the networks. RePass cautioned that transforming the nation's transportation system into something like the European model will resemble a local more than an express. "We've spent half a century disinvesting in rail; we're not going to overcome that overnight." But Szabo said that the renewed commitment to rail is already picking up steam. "This is a 40-year build-out, just like the Interstate Highway System was in the 1950s," he said. "Looking back at the history of the highway program, it took more than three years to get federal money out the door. We anticipate money out the door in less than three months." Although there's an almost surprising lack of organized opposition to high-speed rail, that doesn't mean that there aren't still hurdles to clear.

SOURCE: Washington Post
 AUTHOR: John Rosenthal
 URL: <http://tinyurl.com/25zgoyu>
 DATE: 04/25/2010

States make the case for building essential transportation capacity

State transportation leaders have identified their most urgently needed capacity expansion projects that are critical to rebuilding the economy and keeping a competitive edge worldwide in a series of new reports by the American Association of State Highway & Transportation Officials (AASHTO), the first of which was released in April 2010 in Fort Worth, Texas.

The first in the series, "[Transportation Reboot: Unlocking Gridlock](#)," shows how population growth and related congestion are straining existing transportation networks. The report offers state-by-state examples of urgent capacity needs. In the Lone Star State alone, an estimated \$300 billion in new funds is needed to provide roads for an expected population boom during the next 30 years, according to the Texas Transportation Commission.

"Our report shows that we are experiencing system overload," AASHTO Executive Director John Horsley said at a news conference Monday in Fort Worth. "While congestion levels declined with the recession, congestion is now returning, costing millions in lost time and productivity. Capacity increases are needed in transit, rail, and particularly in highways."

Texas Transportation Commissioner William Meadows and Chris Bauserman, president of the National Association of County Engineers, also spoke at the news conference. The report outlines a four-part approach to improving the nation's transportation system:

1. Preserve and modernize the system;
2. Improve system performance;
3. Shift trips to other options such as intercity passenger rail, mass transit, bicycles, and walking; and shift more freight from trucks to rail;
4. Add needed highway capacity.

Urgent capacity expansion projects cited in the report range from Houston's U.S. 290 corridor, one of the most congested highways in Texas that is projected to serve staggering growth, to expansion of the Interstate 15 Canada-to-Mexico trade corridor in Nevada. Other projects include completion of the Interstate 905 freeway in southern California and new commuter-rail links in Michigan.

"Texas continues to grow rapidly, even during these times of economic recession and uncertainty," said Amadeo Saenz Jr., executive director of the Texas Department of Transportation. "As more new Texans move to our state each day, the challenges facing us in addressing the worsening urban congestion only increase. Finding

ways to successfully implement transportation solutions that increase capacity and improve mobility within our major metropolitan and urban communities is a high priority for Texas."

AASHTO President Butch Brown, director of the Mississippi Department of Transportation, said highway system expansion is critical. The report calls for the addition of 30,000 lane-miles to the current 85,000-lane-mile Interstate Highway System and the addition of 40,000 lane-miles to urban segments of the National Highway System.

"If most or all of our capital investment were made in system rehabilitation and little to none in adding needed capacity, road conditions would improve, but traffic would grind to a halt," he said. The U.S. population is expected to increase from 308 million today to more than 420 million by 2050, the report states. If this growth follows the same pattern of the last 50 years, 80% of that population growth will be concentrated in metropolitan areas.

Susan Martinovich, AASHTO vice president and director of the Nevada Department of Transportation, has seen first-hand how population increases affect capacity needs. "Over past years, Nevada's population grew faster than much of the rest of the nation," she said. "To provide mobility, increase safety, and spur commerce for this larger population, it is vital that Nevada has the ability to add needed transportation improvements and upkeep existing roads."

Financial resources will be necessary for state DOTs to be able to add transportation capacity, North Carolina Transportation Secretary Gene Conti said during a Monday briefing with reporters in Raleigh as part of the national release of AASHTO's report. "States need a stable and reliable source of funding to do these types of long-term projects," Conti said.

The 48-page "Unlocking Gridlock" report and state-by-state examples of urgent capacity needs are available at expandingcapacity.transportation.org. A short video outlining key points of the report is available at www.transportation.org. Also, more coverage of this report's release is available on [Transportation TV](#). Future reports in the "Transportation Reboot" series will address connecting rural and urban America, and the nation's freight capacity needs.

SOURCE: AASHTO Journal
URL: <http://tinyurl.com/3xa4y7n>
DATE: 04/30/10

NAFTA surface trade takes record jump

Surface transportation trade among the United States, Canada and Mexico jumped 24.1% in February from a year ago, the highest gain on record, the Department of Transportation said Thursday, April 29th.

But the increase to \$59.5 billion in trade among the [North American Free Trade Agreement](#) partners left the index 14.3% below the level two years earlier, in February 2008.

The upturn was the third straight following December's 10.5% rise — the first year-over-year gain since September 2008 — and a 19.5% improvement in January.

February's trade was 4.9% over January, though month-to-month changes can be affected by seasonal

variations and other factors, DOT's Bureau of Trade Statistics said in its monthly report.

Truck imports to the United States rose 17% from a year earlier to \$19.9 billion, while exports grew 21.5% to \$20.1 billion, DOT said.

Rail imports jumped 58.1% to \$6.8 billion, while exports increased 34.6% to \$3.6 billion. Pipeline imports rose 51.9% to \$5 billion, while exports fell 32% to \$341 million.

SOURCE: Transport Topics Online
URL: <http://tinyurl.com/25nqqom>

DATE: 04/29/10

BTS releases new report "Freight Transportation: Global Highlights (2010)"

The Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) part of the U.S. Department of Transportation has recently released a new report entitled "Freight Transportation: Global Highlights (2010)." This report provides a snapshot of freight transportation activity from a global perspective, highlighting physical characteristics and industry output for the U.S. and other leading world economies.

The report gives a broad overview of trends in the movement of international freight among the top 25 world economies, measured by 2008 gross domestic product (GDP). It presents recent statistics on freight activity by leading global ocean and air carriers, sea-ports, and airports engaged in international freight services.

The report also presents an overview of major trends in U.S. international goods trade, as well as trends in U.S. freight and port services. It further examines how U.S. international freight activities compare with those of the world's top economies. The report concludes with a brief discussion of the key factors that are driving change in U.S. and global merchandise trade and freight activities.

The United States has the largest freight transportation system in the world, an extensive physical network of infrastructure and entities that provide

transportation services including:

- 4 million miles of public roads,
- 140,000 miles of railroad tracks operated by freight carriers,
- 25,000 miles of navigable waterways,
- 9,800 coastal and inland waterway facilities, and
- 5,200 public-use airports (USDOT RITA BTS 2009a).

The U.S. transportation network serves more than 300 million people and 7.5 million business establishments across 3.8 million square miles of land. Moving raw materials and finished goods between production and consumption centers, this freight network is a vital component of commerce in the United States.

The United States is the world's largest economy and leading importing nation, accounting for 23 percent of world GDP and 13 percent of the value of world merchandise imports in 2008. Before 2002, the United States was the world's largest merchandise exporter. Germany became the leading exporting nation that year, and China moved to the top position in 2008. For additional information, please see the following web-link:

<http://tinyurl.com/2cex6jj>

SOURCE: Bureau of Transportation Statistics

Crude spill may threaten some Gulf oil operations

A growing oil slick in the Gulf of Mexico well in the Gulf of Mexico could hamper production, shipping and refining of oil and natural gas in Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana, Bloomberg reported Monday. The leak, which stems from an April 20 explosion at a BP oil rig in the gulf, could affect the capacity of those three states, which account for about 19% of U.S. refining capacity, Bloomberg said, citing the Department of Energy.

The spill, which could drift west toward New Orleans, has the potential to hinder ships entering and leaving the Mississippi River and deliveries to and from the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port, Andy Lipow, president of Houston-based Lipow Oil Associates, told Bloomberg.

Crude futures, which closed near an 18-month high over \$86 a barrel on Friday on the New York Mercantile Exchange, rose 39 cents Monday to \$86.54 a barrel on the Nymex, Bloomberg said. President Obama, who has mobilized federal resources to help deal with the crisis, called the leak a "massive and



Photo: NASA satellite images

potentially unprecedented" disaster that could affect the economy of the Gulf states and the jobs of those who depend on the Gulf for their livelihood, Bloomberg reported.

SOURCE: Transport Topics On-Line

URL: <http://tinyurl.com/2526hs4>

DATE: 05/03/10

Panama Canal: engineering achievement, economic engine, and just plain magnificent (U.S. DOT Secretary's blog)

When I was a junior high school teacher, I taught students about the Panama Canal. It is one of the true man-made wonders of the world, and I always wanted to see it firsthand.

Well, last week I got my wish, and it was one of the thrills of a lifetime.



Now, the Panama Canal is not just a historic engineering achievement; it is an economic engine. And the expansion of the Canal currently underway will be a real bonanza, not just for Panama, but for the world.

At a recent [summit on ports](#) in San Diego, I saw that everyone in the American maritime community is anticipating the 2014 opening of the expanded Panama Canal. They know how important the increased capacity will be to world trade, and they know that this increased capacity means greater activity for US ports. So to see the progress of that expansion up close was really something.

Before my visit I knew the Canal would be impressive from a transportation point-of-view. After all, it has made possible the transit of over 960,000 ships since 1914. But I had no idea it would be so beautiful. I urge anyone who is interested in learning more about the Canal or seeing its magnificence to visit the Canal's [website](#) or check out one of the many live [webcams](#).

I want to thank my hosts in Panama, US Ambassador to Panama Barbara Stephenson and Panama Canal Authority Administrator Alberto Aleman. It was a delight to tour the [Miraflres Visitor Center](#) and to watch as a ship passed within inches of either side of the Miraflres locks. Administrator Aleman even let me close one of the locks. Don't worry; he assured me that it was fail-safe! Not bad for a former civics teacher from Peoria.

SOURCE: Fast Lane, Official Blog for U.S. DOT Secretary

URL: <http://tinyurl.com/28e6abd>

DATE: 04/19/10

U.S. DOT releases guide to programs that promote sustainable communities

The U.S. Department of Transportation issued a reference guide this week that identifies resources for promoting livable and sustainable communities.

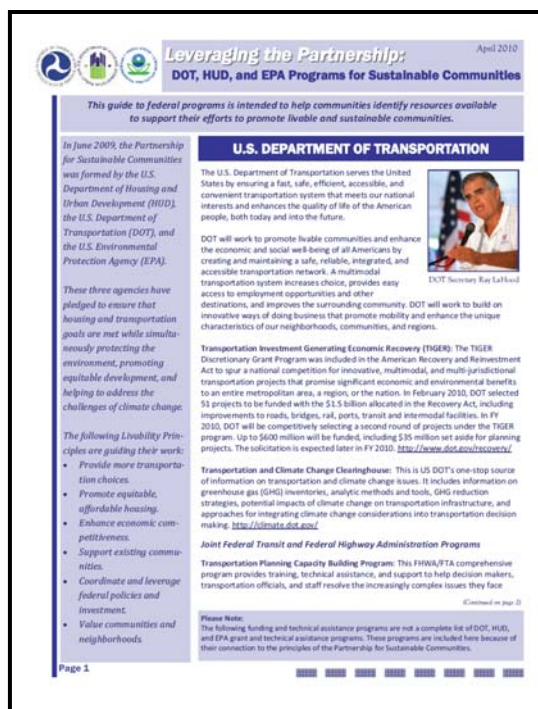
U.S. DOT released the guide in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The document, "Leveraging the Partnership: DOT, HUD, & EPA Programs for Sustainable Communities," summarizes the various federal programs available and how to get more information on each.

While not intended as a list of all U.S. DOT, HUD, and EPA funding and technical assistance programs, the document does include those activities and initiatives that are connected to the principles of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities. That partnership was formed by the three agencies in June 2009 to address environmental protection, equitable development, and climate change.

The partnership also seeks to help Americans gain better access to more transportation options, lower travel costs, and affordable housing. The document highlights each agency's commitment and contributions to meeting those shared goals.

"DOT will work to promote livable communities and enhance the economic and social well-being of all Americans by creating and maintaining a safe, reliable, integrated, and accessible transportation network," according to the reference guide. "A multimodal transportation system increases choice, provides easy access to employment opportunities and other destinations, and improves the surrounding community."

The transportation section of the document profiles various funding opportunities available for livable community projects through the Federal Transit Administration and Federal Highway Administration. Examples include the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery grant program; Metropolitan & Statewide



Planning Formula grant; Rural & Small Urban Area Formula grants; programs serving populations such as the elderly, disabled persons, and low-income workers who face particular challenges involving access to critical services; National Scenic Byways Program; and Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality Program.

The 16-page U.S. DOT/HUD/EPA document is available at tinyurl.com/dot-hud-epa-report.

AASHTO released a report last week urging inclusion of roads in U.S. DOT's livability program. The 18-page report is available at tinyurl.com/AASHTO-livability. (see April 23 AASHTO Journal story)

SOURCE: AASHTO Journal
URL: <http://tinyurl.com/2w53nmp>
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FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

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Famous Quote of the Day:

"There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature."

--Rachel Carson,
founder of the contemporary
environmental movement

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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 Talking Freight web seminar on June 16th

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 (FPD) aimed at providing technical assistance, training, tools, and information to help the freight and planning workforce meet the transportation challenges of tomorrow.

The Talking Freight seminars are sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and are held via web conference. This means that you view the PowerPoint presentations over the Internet while listening to the presenters over the telephone. The FHWA "Talking Freight" 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 June 16th, and will cover the topic of "Promoting Economic

Revitalization Through Enhancing Freight Transportation." Freight-related businesses provide major economic benefits to their communities, and also provide significant benefits at the state and national level. However, those economic benefits can only be fully realized when the transportation system works in an efficient manner and can adequately support freight transportation movements. As the U.S. continues its recovery from the national and worldwide economic recession and freight transportation movements increase as a result of increased manufacturing and production, it will become increasingly critical that the transportation system has the ability to operate efficiently and help sustain the economic recovery. For additional information on registering for this web seminar, please see the following URL web-link:

<http://tinyurl.com/ycsvqjz>

SOURCE: FHWA Office of Freight Management & Operations (HOFM)

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The FHWA "Talking Freight" monthly webinar series is now eligible for AICP certification maintenance (CM) credits for AICP members through the American Planning Association. Credits can be claimed at: <http://www.planning.org/cm/search/provider.htm?ProviderCompanyID=246167>

For additional information please contact Ms. Carol Keenan of FHWA HQ's at: carol.keenan@dot.gov

U.S. trucking industry will not support a VMT tax says

Speaking on the 'Political Leadership and Project Champions panel at the Symposium on Mileage-Based User Fees' in Minneapolis, the American Trucking Associations' (ATA) vice president Bob Pitcher has said the trucking industry will oppose a VMT tax, suggesting they have proven costly to administer, enforce, and to comply with.

He added that the industry regards a VMT tax as a weight-distance tax (WDT). More than 20 states have already repealed WDTs as outdated and ineffective. All but four states currently rely on a combination of truck registration fees and fuel taxes as the most efficient, cost-effective way to raise money to build and repair roads. "Imagine the bureaucracy needed to oversee and collect VMT fees from millions of highway users," Pitcher stated. Even when a system is in place to supervise collection of taxes, the VMT concept has proven vul-

nerable to evasion. That could ruin any financial benefits of the tax. "Keeping track of a gallon of fuel, a valuable, tangible product, is far easier than keeping track of a mile traveled." The federal fuel tax collected at the pump – 18.4 cents per gallon of gasoline and 24.4 cents per gallon of diesel – has long been the most equitable, low-cost method of funding highway infrastructure. Hybrid and electric technology continues to grow in the passenger vehicle market and lessen the demand for gasoline. Finding an alternative to the federal tax on gasoline is a far more urgent need than finding an alternative to the fuel tax on diesel. Currently there is no readily available alternative to diesel fuel for over-the-road trucks, so diesel consumption remains relatively stable.

SOURCE: PRNewswire
URL: <http://tinyurl.com/29bxkg6>
DATE: 04/20/2010