

MISSISSIPPI VALLEY FREIGHT COALITION

2010 CONFERENCE & ANNUAL MEETING

THE OBERSTAR BILL

The next surface transportation authorization bill (known as the Oberstar Bill) is still in draft form and contains many undefined aspects, especially where funding is concerned. As such, it is difficult to compare the draft legislation to the MVFC reauthorization recommendations. With that caveat, this is how the Oberstar Bill aligns with MVFC recommendations.

PROGRAMS

Three programs important to the MVFC are included in the Oberstar Bill. No funding amounts are currently listed.

Freight Program

The Oberstar Bill includes provisions for the creation of a national freight program. Projects in this program must be consistent with state freight plans and have state freight advisory committees. Each project must include performance measures, targets, and reporting. Corridor coalitions may be designated as projects in the national freight program; such coalitions must include states, MPOs, major transportation modes, and freight stakeholders. Coalitions may receive grants for planning. Funding for projects in this program would be apportioned to the states. The basis for the apportionment is not yet specified.

Critical Asset Investment Program

The Critical Asset Investment (CAI) program focuses on the rehabilitation of the National Highway System (NHS); general capacity projects are not eligible. The CAI plan would include a six-year investment strategy, which must be approved by the Secretary of the US DOT. This program requires specific measures and targets: percentage of deficient NHS bridge deck area and percentage of highways rated at or below fair. The cost of developing management systems is also eligible. Funding for projects in this program would be apportioned to the states. The basis for the apportionment is not yet specified.

Projects of National Significance Program

The Projects of National Significance program includes projects with a range of evaluation criteria, ranging from economic impact to location to NAFTA traffic impacts. The Transportation Research Board will evaluate the selection process. In order to be eligible for this program, a project must cost more than \$500 million or more than 75 percent of the amount apportioned to the relevant state in the previous fiscal year. Rail and port projects are both eligible.

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

The Oberstar Bill includes several provisions for freight rail projects, including a Class II and Class III grant program (\$50 million per year). Rail projects showing a public benefit are eligible for designation as projects of national significance. The bill also would require the Secretary of the US DOT to report annually on the condition and performance of railroads.

MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

The Oberstar Bill suggests that short-sea shipping—defined to include the Great Lakes and inland waterways—should be considered in freight plans.

INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

The Oberstar Bill includes a number of institutional requirements and mandates:

- New offices of intermodalism, expedited project delivery, livability, and public benefit
- Requirements for a national transportation strategic plan
- Parameters for private financing of public facilities
- Mandates for uniform toll collection devices
- Recognition of corridor coalitions for planning

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The Oberstar Bill includes requirements for performance measures, targets, and reporting for all programs.

TRUCK SIZE AND WEIGHT

There are no provisions for changes to truck size and weight regulations in the Oberstar Bill.

