



The Construction Legislative Week in Review

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Senate Committee Passes Asbestos Legislation: On July 10, the Senate Judiciary Committee passed legislation to address the asbestos litigation system. This legislation would create a trust fund— paid for by businesses and insurance companies— from which those exposed to asbestos would receive compensation instead of navigating the court system. The bill, S. 1125 was passed out of the Committee on a close vote of 10-8, with only one Democrat supporting the measure. The bill still faces some major hurdles before being moved to the Senate floor as negotiations continue on funding the trust fund and compensation levels. In addition, this week the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Senator Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) expressed a desire for his committee to review the bill. Such action would further delay any floor consideration. AGC is supportive of an asbestos litigation reform bill because it would create some certainty for those involved in asbestos lawsuits. For more information contact Kelly Krauser, 202-547-4685 or krauserk@agc.org.

House Panel Approves \$8 Billion for EPA, Reduces Clean Water SRF: The House Water Resources & Environment Subcommittee met on July 17th and approved H.R.1560, the Water Quality Financing Act of 2003, which would authorize \$20 billion to the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund over five years. Consideration of the bill by the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee has been postponed until Davis-Bacon issues can be negotiated. In related news, funding for EPA would be authorized at \$8 billion in 2004. The proposed EPA authorization level reflects a \$74 million drop from the allocation approved last year in the FY 2003 omnibus appropriations bill, but a \$375 million increase above what President Bush requested in his FY 2004 EPA budget proposal. A significant change from the administration's proposed EPA budget is the funding level approved for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund. At the approved \$1.2 billion level, the authorization would be a \$350 million increase over the administration's request, but the figure still falls \$150 million below this year's \$1.35 billion level. For more information contact Stu Megaw, 703-837-5321 or megaws@agc.org.

DOT Unveils "Highways For Life" Proposal: AGC CEO Steve Sandherr and Senior Executive Director, Government and Public Affairs Jeff Shoaf were invited to a ninety-minute meeting with senior Department of Transportation officials— including Secretary Norman Mineta and Federal Highway Administrator Mary Peters— to view a presentation on the Department's "Highways for LIFE" concept. The proposal, which is expected to be introduced as an amendment to the administration's highway reauthorization proposal, is designed to improve safety, reduce congestion due to construction, and improve quality. "Highways for LIFE" is an acronym for Long lasting highways using Innovative technologies and practices to accomplish Fast construction of Efficient and safe pavements and bridges. DOT would seek to identify pilot projects of various sizes that would allow for innovative practices and improved technologies to reduce on-site construction time, attain higher quality, and improve safety. For more information contact Brian Deery, 703-837-5319 or deeryb@agc.org.

Water Resources Development Act of 2003 Approved by House T&I Committee: Yesterday the U.S. House T&I Committee approved legislation to authorize U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) projects and studies for river and harbor navigation improvements, flood and storm damage reduction, and environmental restoration. H.R. 2557, the "Water Resources Development Act of 2003"— introduced in the House by Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska), chairman of the Transportation Committee, and Rep. John J. Duncan, Jr. (R-Tenn.), chairman of the Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee— was unanimously approved by voice vote. Also approved was an amendment offered by Chairman Duncan and Subcommittee Ranking Member Jerry Costello (D-Ill.) establishing a peer review process for Corps projects, as well as a manager's amendment. For more information contact Marco Giamberardino, 703-837-5325 or giambern@agc.org.

House Committee Approves FY 04 Transportation Funding Measure: Bowing to pressure from the House Republican leadership who were anxious to have all appropriations bills out of committee before the House begins its summer recess tomorrow, Transportation, Treasury and Postal Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Earnest Istook (R-Okla.) negotiated a compromise on Amtrak funding in the FY 2004 transportation appropriations bill. The House Appropriations Committee approved the measure today. The bill funds the highway program at \$33.4 billion, an increase of \$1.8 billion over FY 2003, although a \$300 million reduction from the level approved in subcommittee. Discretionary highway funding of \$300 million was also provided. At the subcommittee level, Amtrak would have been eligible for this \$300 million of Highway Trust Fund dollars but this eligibility was eliminated as part of the negotiated agreement. Amtrak funding was increased to \$900 million over the \$580 million approved by the subcommittee, although this is a decrease from last year's \$1.04 billion and far short of the \$1.8 billion requested. Transit funding was set at \$7.2 billion, the same as current year funding, and \$100 million over the subcommittee level. Funding for the Airport Improvement Program was set at \$3.5 billion, an increase of \$122 million over current funding. Funding for the transportation enhancement program— which pays for bike trails, pedestrian pathways and other similar projects— was restored after having been eliminated in the subcommittee bill. However, the compromise gives states the option of using the same amount of money for enhancement projects or building roads. Both the House and the Senate will take up the measure in September at the conclusion of the summer recess. For more information contact Brian Deery, 703-837-5319 or deeryb@agc.org.