



June 1, 2012

Legislation

Congressional schedule. The Senate is not in session this week due to the Memorial Day recess. The Senate will reconvene on Monday, June 4. The House of Representatives is in session this week.

House, Senate negotiations continue on surface transportation bill. Negotiations between House and Senate leaders continue in the effort to produce a long-awaited surface transportation bill. The 47 members of the House, Senate conference committee held their initial meeting on May 8th. Since then, meetings have continued among the conference committee leaders – Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Chairwoman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and Congressman John Mica (R-FL), Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

Every six years, the U.S. Congress reauthorizes legislation that determines the volume of spending, the recipients of that spending, and the revenue sources of that spending for the nation's surface transportation system. The current surface transportation plan, the "Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users" (SAFETEA-LU), had an expiration date of September 30, 2009. Since Congress has been unable to reach consensus on a new six year authorization, the current legislation has repeatedly been extended.

On March 14, the Senate passed a two year, \$109 billion bill by a 74-22 margin. The House thus far has failed to pass anything beyond an extension of the current law. The most recent action was a 90 day extension passed on April 18 that expires on June 30, 2012.

A remaining point of contention in the negotiations is over the proposed Keystone XL Pipeline. The House-approved extension of the surface transportation bill includes a provision for construction of TransCanada Corp.'s proposed pipeline to bring Canadian oil sands to refineries along the Gulf Coast. The provision is not included in the Senate-passed version.

Schumer requests FRA to mandate debris-carrying cars be covered. Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) called on the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to launch a safety investigation into reports that uncovered freight cars are transporting loose debris on Long Island Rail Road tracks and have damaged residents' cars and ended up on private property. In a May 21 letter to the FRA, Schumer raised safety concerns for local residents whose property abuts the tracks and for the implications of loose debris on commuter rail tracks. Schumer called for the FRA to mandate that any freight cars traveling through densely populated urban and suburban communities be required by federal rules, to cover cars carrying loose debris.

“The safety implications of uncovered debris traveling on commuter transit lines are too numerous to count,” said Schumer. “Whether it is damage to private property surrounding the tracks or potential obstruction on commuter rail lines that carry hundreds of thousands of people in and out of New York City every day, carrying loose debris, uncovered in freight cars is a dangerous recipe for disaster and it must be stopped, now.”

Schumer is asking the FRA to launch an immediate investigation into the safety implications of freight carriers transporting uncovered loose debris on the LIRR in residential neighborhoods. Schumer is specifically asking the FRA to visit the site and investigate. Schumer also called on the FRA to require that freight carriers who operate their trains in an urban or suburban community be required to cover train cars transporting loose debris.

Administration

Bostick assumes command of Army Corps of Engineers. Lt. Gen. Thomas Bostick became the 53rd U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) commanding general and U.S. Army chief of engineers during an assumption of command ceremony on May 22.

At USACE, Bostick serves as the senior military officer overseeing most of the nation’s civil works infrastructure and military construction. He is responsible for more than 37,000 civilian employees and 600 military personnel who provide project management and construction support to 250 Army and Air Force installations in more than 100 countries around the world.

Bostick also oversees USACE's diverse missions such as hundreds of environmental protection projects; the regulatory permit program to protect, restore and enhance thousands of acres of wetlands; and the emergency response mission to support the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

In addition, as the chief of engineers, Bostick advises the Army on engineering matters and serves as the Army's topographer and the proponent for real estate and other related engineering programs.

“Now, more than ever, the nation needs a lean, agile, strong, capable, competent and trusted Corps of Engineers. One that serves the Army and nation; and one that truly teams with our many military, federal, state, local government, host nation governments, tribal, academia, industry and non-government partners to solve the engineering and scientific challenges facing the joint force, the nation and the global community,” Bostick said.

“I’m committed to working with all our partners to continue the rich traditions of the Corps, meet the needs of this country and always deliver,” he added.

Lt. Gen. Bostick graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1978 with a Bachelor of Science degree. He holds a master’s in civil engineering and mechanical engineering from Stanford University, and is a graduate of the U.S. Army War College. He is a registered professional engineer in Virginia.