



## SOY TRANSPORTATION COALITION WASHINGTON REPORT



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### Legislation

**Hahn calls on Congress to highlight bridge safety.** Congresswoman Janice Hahn (D-CA), a member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, recently called on Congress to hold a hearing on bridge safety after a pair of high-profile collapses.

A bridge on Interstate 5 in Washington State – classified as functionally obsolete by the Department of Transportation – collapsed May 23 after being struck by a truck carrying an oversize load. Vehicles plunged into the Skagit River.

"We are lucky that there were not any fatalities," Hahn said. "With over 70,000 bridges that have been classified as 'structurally deficient' nationwide, it is clear we have an infrastructure crisis in this country and it is only a matter of time before another bridge collapses and lives could be lost."

Hahn said the Washington accident, which was followed by the collapse of a bridge in Missouri days later, should prompt Congress to provide more money for infrastructure. The second bridge collapse, in Scott, Missouri, was reportedly caused by a collision between two freight trains underneath it that resulted in a support pillar being struck.

"I believe that we need to examine our nation's investment in bridges," Hahn wrote in a letter to House Transportation Committee Chairman Bill Shuster (R-PA.). She said bridge safety should be a priority because many of other existing structures in the U.S. are presently at risk of collapse. "By holding a hearing focusing on the state of our nation's bridges, we can begin to address the problem."

Hahn introduced a bill, H.R. 1419, dubbed the "Bridge to Jobs Act." It would boost federal spending on infrastructure to repair or replace bridges that have been deemed "structurally deficient" by the Federal Highway Administration.

The Soy Transportation Coalition is exploring the potential of partnering with federal, state, or local government entities in eleven states to conduct a pilot project of bridge assessment technology in rural areas of the country. To read an article summarizing the current project with the Iowa Department of Transportation and Iowa State University, go to the following link: <http://www.soybeanreview.com/article/bridging-gap>

**Commerce Committee approves Commerce, Transportation nominees.** A Senate committee recently unanimously approved President Obama's nominees to head the Commerce and Transportation departments. Chicago business executive and philanthropist Penny Pritzker and Charlotte, North Carolina Mayor Anthony Foxx, Secretary of Transportation nominee, are both expected to be confirmed easily by the full Senate this summer according to Senator John Thune (R-SD).

The Commerce, Science and Technology Committee did not formally meet to vote on the nominations. Senators instead dropped by a room off the Senate floor, where a committee clerk recorded their approval.

Pritzker, the Secretary of Commerce nominee, is a longtime Obama friend who raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for his presidential campaigns. Foxx, nominee for Secretary of Transportation, won national recognition when Charlotte hosted the Democratic National Convention last year. He often served as a surrogate in North Carolina for Obama during his re-election.

**Senators appointed to head subcommittees.** On June 10, Senator Jay Rockefeller (D-WV), Chairman of the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, appointed Senator Mark Warner (D-VA) as chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety and Security. Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) was appointed chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Competitiveness, Innovation and Export Promotion.

“Senator Warner knows first-hand the importance of making investments in our transportation system and how they fuel our economic engine,” said Rockefeller. “He brings unique ideas and experience to this position, and a staunch commitment to rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure and expanding all modes of transportation.”

“Senator Blumenthal is one of our loudest voices when it comes to championing the nation’s manufacturing sector. He is always striving to make sure it remains competitive for future generations, never wavering from his fight so that Americans are competing on a level playing field and at the forefront of global innovation,” Rockefeller said.

**Hearing highlights leadership transition, procedural review at Army Corps.** Leadership changes recently occurred within the ranks of the Army Corps of Engineers along with a review of the outgoing chief’s annual report. Major General John Peabody will replace retiring Major General Michael Walsh as deputy chief of Civil and Emergency Operations in October. Colonel Ed Fleming, currently serving as district engineer in New Orleans, will move to Washington, D.C. to become executive director of Civil and Emergency Operations.

Chairman Bill Shuster (R-PA) of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee said the hearing held June 5 will play a valuable role in the committee’s development of a Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). He said it’s critical for Congress to re-engage in the development of the nation’s water resources, like new or refurbished locks and dams on the Mississippi River and other inland waterways.

“Congress has only enacted two WRDA laws in the last 14 years,” Congressman Shuster said. “We have many goals we want to accomplish in WRDA, but one of the most important is to get WRDAs back on two-year cycles to ensure Congress has a fundamental role in the development of Corps of Engineers projects and in the oversight of the agency.

“I want to thank General Walsh for his service to the nation. If this were an easy job, Congress would not have given the mission to the Army,” he concluded.

Congressman Bob Gibbs (R-OH), Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, said Congress needs to change the way the Corps of Engineers carries out its business. The level of analysis required by law and regulations are crippling the project delivery process, Gibbs said. That delays projects and costs taxpayers too much money.

“It is no longer acceptable that studies for construction and improvement projects take dozens of years to complete,” he said. “As we move forward with what will be a policy-heavy Water Resources Development Act, we will be focusing on accelerating the study and project delivery process, as well as better prioritizing these worthwhile investments that the American public has relied on for decades.”

## **Administration**

**Demand for TIGER Grants far exceeds available funding.** The U.S. Department of Transportation announced earlier this month that demand for Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grants again surpassed available funding. Applications for funding topped \$474 million, far exceeding the \$474 million set aside for the program this year.

The department received 568 applications from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and American Samoa.

"President Obama challenged us to improve our nation's infrastructure to provide the transportation choices people and businesses want and the efficiency and safety they need," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. "TIGER projects do exactly that — across the country, they are helping relieve congestion, create jobs and generate lasting economic growth."

Grants are available for surface transportation infrastructure improvements and will be awarded on a competitive basis. To date, the program has awarded \$3.1 billion for 218 projects in all 50 states, D.C. and Puerto Rico.

**LaHood announces Freight Advisory Committee members.** U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood recently announced the members of the National Freight Advisory Committee (NFAC). The diverse group of 47 professionals provides advice and recommendations to policymakers aimed at improving the national freight transportation system.

The committee is comprised of voting members outside the U.S. Department of Transportation, which includes railroad, trucking, agribusiness and other stakeholders with an interest in a strong freight system. Brad Hildebrand, global rail and barge lead for Cargill, Inc., is a member of the group.

"The strength of our economy and the strength of our national freight system go hand in hand," said Secretary LaHood. "The members of this committee understand firsthand the critical importance of freight movement, and their valuable insight will help ensure that our system is more secure and better connected."

A strong freight transportation system is critical to the nation's economy and essential for helping meet President Obama's goal of doubling U.S. exports by 2015.

Members will serve two-year terms and meet at least three times per year. The first NFAC meeting is scheduled for June 25, 2013, at the Department of Transportation and will include an overview of MAP-21 freight provisions and preliminary identification of NFAC activities.

MAP-21 established a national freight policy and called for the creation of a National Freight Strategic Plan. By engaging stakeholders representing diverse interests, the Advisory Committee will provide recommendations to the Secretary of Transportation on how DOT can improve its freight transportation policies and programs.

A complementary organization, the U.S. Department of Commerce's Advisory Committee on Supply Chain Competitiveness, was established in 2012 and serves a similar mission as the U.S. DOT's NFAC. Mike Steenhoek, executive director of the Soy Transportation Coalition, is a member of the Department of Commerce advisory panel.