



November 8, 2010

Midterm Elections

Midterm elections reshape House Transportation Committee. The results of the 2010 midterm elections will have a major impact on the nation's transportation policy. This was acutely reflected in the House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee. Not only will the majority of the committee shift from the Democrats to the Republicans, 16 of the Democrat majority's 45 seats were defeated in the election. On the Republican side, only one member of the T&I committee was defeated. Between incumbent losses and retirements, almost one-third of the T&I committee's 75 members will no longer be on the committee in the new 112th Congress.

The most notable defeat on the committee was Chairman James Oberstar (D-MN). Oberstar has been in the House of Representatives for 36 years. Congressman John Mica (R-FL) will likely take over as Chairman. Congressman Nick Rahall (D-WV) will be the most senior member Democrat and will likely become the Ranking Member for the minority. Other notable defeats on the House T&I Committee: Gene Taylor (D-MS) and Phil Hare (D-IL).

Mica has promoted robust investment in the next surface transportation reauthorization bill, but he has criticized the 2009 stimulus bill for waste. He recently suggested that the President and congressional Democrats "hijacked the \$862 billion so-called stimulus, leaving less than 7 percent in the bill for infrastructure, and they failed to ensure that even this small percentage of funds would be spent expeditiously." Mica argues the administration's priority should be to get the money in the stimulus bill spent by eliminating red tape.

Oberstar had advocated raising the gas tax to fund surface transportation programs, while Mica has consistently been opposed to tax increases. Mica has expressed an interest in eliminating the gas tax in favor of a sales tax on fuel to stabilize the Highway Trust Fund. The tax could fluctuate within a predetermined range based on the total purchase price rather than on a per-gallon basis. A per-gallon tax is proving to be unsustainable as vehicles are becoming more fuel efficient.

In addition, Mica calls for "cost-effective passenger rail transportation, including a better directed high speed rail program."

House Transportation and Infrastructure Members vacating committee due to election defeat or retirement:

Democrats:

James Oberstar (MN) – defeated
Gene Taylor (MS) – defeated
Brian Baird (WA) – retired
Michael Arcuri (NY) – defeated
Harry Mitchell (AZ) – defeated
Christopher Carney (PA) – defeated
John Hall (NY) – defeated
Steve Kagan (WI) – defeated
Solomon Ortiz (TX) – defeated
Phil Hare (IL) – defeated
John Boccieri (OH) – defeated
Mark Schauer (MI) – defeated
Betsy Markey (CO) – defeated
Michael McMahon (NY) – defeated
Thomas Perriello (VA) – defeated
Dina Titus (NV) – defeated
Harry Teague (NM) – defeated

Republicans:

Vernon Ehlers (MI) – retired
Jerry Moran (KS) – elected to Senate
Henry Brown (SC) – retired
John Boozman (AR) – elected to Senate
Mary Fallin (OK) – retired
Anh “Joseph” Cao (LA) – defeated

Few changes on Senate Commerce Committee. Only three of the 25 members of the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee will not be members of the new 112th Congress. Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND) did not seek reelection. Senator George LeMieux (R-FL) was appointed to complete the remaining term of Senator Mel Martinez and did not run for the seat (won by Marco Rubio). Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) did not seek reelection in order to run for Governor of Kansas, which he won.

Congressional Schedule

Both the Senate and House of Representatives will reconvene in Washington, DC, for a lame duck session on November 15. They will be in session one week, recess for Thanksgiving week, and return the week of November 29. The lame duck session is expected to last until mid-December.

Senators-elect Mark Kirk (R-IL), Joe Manchin (D-WV), and Chris Coons (D-DE) will be sworn in as soon as their elections are certified – likely next week – rather than at the beginning of the new 112th Congress in January. All three were elected to complete the remaining terms of other Senators (President Barack Obama, the late Senator Robert Byrd, and Vice President Joe Biden). This will result in a 58 Democrat and 42 Republican configuration for the Senate during the lame duck session.

Department of Transportation

DOT, EPA propose fuel efficiency standards for trucks and buses. The U.S. Department of Transportation and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced on November 1st the first national standards to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and improve fuel efficiency of heavy-duty trucks and buses. According to the agencies, the initiative is projected to reduce GHG emissions by nearly 250 million metric tons and save 500 million barrels of oil over the lives of the vehicles produced within the program’s first five years.

“Through new fuel-efficiency standards for trucks and buses, we will not only reduce transportation’s environmental impact, we’ll reduce the cost of transporting freight,” said U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. “This is a win-win-win for the environment, businesses and the American consumer.”

DOT and EPA’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) are proposing new standards for three categories of heavy trucks: combination tractors, heavy-duty pickups and vans, and vocational vehicles. The categories were established to address specific challenges for manufacturers in each area. For combination tractors, the agencies are proposing engine and vehicle standards that begin in the 2014 model year and achieve up to a 20 percent reduction in CO2 emissions and fuel consumption by 2018 model year. For heavy-duty pickup trucks and vans, the agencies are proposing separate gasoline and diesel truck standards which phase in starting in the 2014 model year and achieve up to a 10 percent reduction for gasoline vehicles and 15 percent reduction for diesel vehicles by 2018 model year (12 and 17 percent respectively if accounting for air conditioning leakage). Lastly, for vocational vehicles, the agencies are proposing engine and vehicle standards starting in the 2014 model year which would achieve up to a 10 percent reduction in fuel consumption and CO2 emissions by 2018 model year.

The DOT and EPA estimate that fuel savings would pay for the cost of the required upgrades within a year and save \$74,000 over the truck’s useful life.