

Mahoney Fast Tracks Fix for Public Transit Money

40% Increase in Federal Funds for Community Coach and St. Lucie Community Transit

(August 2, 2007)

(Washington, D.C.) - Late last night, the House passed the SAFTEA-LU Technical Corrections Act of 2007, which included a provision requested by Congressman Tim Mahoney (FL-16) to prevent Martin County's Community Coach Service and St. Lucie County's Community Transit from losing critical federal funding. Instead, the bill would increase the percentage of federal funding that can be used for public transit operating expenses by 40%.

"Our seniors, neighbors with disabilities, and other residents rely on Community Coach and St. Lucie County's Community Transit to get to work, go to the doctor, go grocery shopping and other day-to-day necessities. As budget cuts have already been made, it was urgent to cut through Washington's red tape and fast track changes to get these folks back on the buses. I want to thank Chairman Oberstar who worked with me to not only get this funding restored, but to increase it by 40%," said Congressman Tim Mahoney.

"Many residents in our community rely on Community Coach and St. Lucie County's Community Transit to get to work, go to the doctor, go grocery shopping and other day-to-day necessities. It is very important that public transportation services continue to meet the needs of our community. At the end of this fiscal year, these services will face cuts to their federal funding if Congress does not act. Getting a solution for this fast tracked is a victory for Community Coach, Community Transit, and all residents who use these services. I will continue working to make sure this provision remains in the bill as it moves through Congress," said Congressman Tim Mahoney.

The SAFTEA-LU bill includes language that Mahoney requested, which would restore the flexibility in the use of federal transit grants.

Specifically, this provision would extend the waiver in the 2005 SAFTEA-LU (P.L: 109-59) through Fiscal Year 2009, in order to allow the 52 communities affected by the 2000 Census to continue using federal grants for operations. The waiver would otherwise expire at the end of this Fiscal Year and public transit systems, including Martin and St. Lucie counties, would not be able to use federal funds for operations.

The legislation passed last night would allow Martin County's Community Coach and St. Lucie County's Community Transit to use up to 35 percent of their federal grant money for operations (for FY 2008 and 2009). This is a 40% increase from the percentage of federal funding that can currently be used for operating expenses: In the current fiscal year (FY 2007), these transit systems are only authorized to use 25 percent of their federal grant money for operations. If Congress does not act, zero percent of federal grant money can be used for operations in FY 2008.

Background:

As a result of the 2000 Census, Martin County and St. Lucie County were merged into one Urbanized Area (UZA). Under current law, transit systems that service urbanized areas exceeding 200,000 people lose their ability to use federal transit funds for operating expenses.

In July, Mahoney became a cosponsor of the Transit System Flexibility Act, H.R. 734 to allow bus systems like Community Coach and St. Lucie Public Transit to have flexibility in how they use federal funds. Congressman Mahoney then met with Chairman James Oberstar of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and Chairman Peter DeFazio of the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit seeking their help with the issue. The Chairmen agreed to help and worked with Mahoney to craft the language included in the SAFTEA-LU Technical Corrections Act.

* SAFTEA-LU stands for Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users.

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