

Mahoney, Council on Aging Call on President Bush to Sign Community Transit Legislation

(Stuart, FL) - Congressman Tim Mahoney (FL-16) held a press conference today to call on President Bush to sign the H.R. 1195, the SAFETEA-LU Technical Corrections Act of 2008 into law, to preserve and increase operations funding for Community Coach. Congress sent the bill to the President this week and it now awaits his signature.

(June 6, 2008)

(Stuart, FL) - Congressman Tim Mahoney (FL-16) held a press conference today to call on President Bush to sign the H.R. 1195, the SAFETEA-LU Technical Corrections Act of 2008 into law, to preserve and increase operations funding for Community Coach. Congress sent the bill to the President this week and it now awaits his signature.

"This bill couldn't have come at a more critical moment. At a time when our state government is cutting essential services, we were actually able to increase the federal funding available for Community Coach and Community Transit's operations preserving this critical service for our elderly and disabled citizens," Congressman Mahoney said. "This a perfect example of how local and federal government can work together to get the job done. I call on the President to sign this legislation quickly so that we can move forward."

"This legislation is critical for the 12,000 riders who depend upon Community Coach to get to the doctor, to go to dialysis, to pick up prescriptions, to shop for food, to go to work, to go to Indian River College and to remain independent. Without it, the Coach and its riders will face up to a 40% cutback in services in the very near future. Without it, we may purchase buses, but we cannot hire drivers and schedulers to route and run them," said Barbara Kauffman, Martin County Council on Aging President and CEO.

On May 2, 2008, the House of Representatives passed the SAFTEA-LU Technical Corrections Act of 2008, which included a provision from Congressman Tim Mahoney (FL-16) that helped Martin County's Community Coach Service and St. Lucie County's Community Transit avoid drastic cuts in critical transit services for elderly and disabled individuals. The SAFTEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users) bill includes language that Mahoney requested, which would restore the flexibility in the use of federal transit grants.

Mahoney's 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. Mahoney's legislation would increase the percentage of federal grant money that Martin County's Community Coach and St. Lucie County's Community Transit can use for operations to 40%, making \$800,000 available for operating costs in Martin and St. Lucie Counties. If Congress had not acted, no federal grant money could be used for operations in the coming fiscal year. The legislation has passed both the House of Representatives and the Senate. It now awaits the President's signature.

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 2007, 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.

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