



THE NEED FOR A DEDICATED FEDERAL FUNDING STREAM FOR LOCAL ON-SYSTEM BRIDGES

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INTRODUCTION

Prior to MAP-21, all structurally deficient or functionally obsolete bridges, regardless of ownership, were eligible for funding under the Highway Bridge Program (HBP). The 2012 Act eliminated the program, however, and shifted a majority of HBP funding to the National Highway Performance Program (NHPP). However, just 23 percent of the nation's bridges are eligible for assistance under the NHPP, as the program only supports bridge projects that are a part of the National Highway System (NHS). The remaining 77 percent of the nation's bridges, which include bridges that are owned by local agencies, must rely on funding from the Surface Transportation Program (STP). Under MAP-21, STP receives less than half of the funding allocation of the NHPP, meaning local bridge projects must compete with a wide range of other transportation projects for very limited STP funding.

The Problem: Locally owned bridges located on Federal-aid highways do not currently have a dedicated funding stream. As a result, critically important local bridge projects must compete with a host of other highway and transit projects for limited funds. Absent a dedicated funding stream, numerous on-system bridges in need of repair or replacement do not receive *any* federal support.

Incidentally, and per MAP-21, each State must set-aside for local off-system bridge projects an amount not less than 15 percent of their fiscal year 2009 HBP apportionment.

The Solution: Congress should restore the HBP, which provided significant funding for State and local bridge projects. In the absence of reinstating the program, Congress should provide a dedicated federal funding stream for locally owned on-system bridges, while maintaining the current off-system set-aside.

Key Definitions: An ***off-system bridge*** is any highway bridge located on a public road that is not on a Federal-aid highway - these are exclusively locally owned bridges. An ***on-system bridge*** is any bridge that is on a Federal-aid highway; in California, over half of locally owned bridges are on-system. It should be noted that a small percentage of locally owned on-system bridges also are part of the NHS. For purposes of this document, references to on-system bridges refer to those bridges that are on a Federal-aid highway but *not* on the NHS.

LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL

To follow is a legislative approach for addressing the on-system bridge funding issue. It should be noted that the proposal is based upon language in the Senate Environment & Public Works Committee-approved MAP-21 reauthorization bill (S 2322) from the 113th Congress, which would have made on-system bridge projects *eligible* for funding under the NHPP.

Unlike the Senate bill, the proposed language below would *require* States to spend at least 15 percent of NHPP funds for bridge projects on Federal-aid highways (other than on the National Highway System).

SEC. XXXX. NATIONAL HIGHWAY PERFORMANCE PROGRAM

Section 119(d)(2) of title 23, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(Q) Replacement (including replacement with fill material), rehabilitation, preservation, and protection (including scour counter measures, seismic retrofits, impact protection measures, security countermeasures, and protection against extreme events) of bridges on Federal-aid highways (other than on the National Highway System), except that a State must obligate at least 15 percent of the funds apportioned to the State under section 104(b)(1) for such purpose.”.

CONCLUSION

Bridges are a unique and vital component of our nation’s transportation system. Unlike most road and pavement projects, many bridge projects entail complex design processes, necessitate long-term planning and procurement, and present unique construction challenges. Moreover, there is little room for error when it comes to bridge safety, as they must remain structurally sound in order to ensure that vehicles and motorists are secure. If a bridge fails, the results are often catastrophic.

Although Congress made the decision to eliminate the HBP as a core federal program, off-system bridges continue to receive a set-aside under MAP-21 in recognition that these structures play a crucial role in the nation's transportation network. California's counties believe it is critical that the next transportation bill provide a dedicated funding stream for local on-system bridges, which are an equally essential component of our state's transportation system.