

House Highway Bill Preserves Commercialization Ban, Restricts Tolling

Leaders of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure released a proposed highway reauthorization bill on Thursday that does not appear to change the long-standing ban on rest area commercialization. NATSO has been vigorously engaged in defending the ban, meeting with lawmakers and staff, organizing NATSO member meeting with lawmakers on this issue and, most recently, organizing a coalition to communicate its support for the ban (see related story below.)

This version of the highway reauthorization legislation, which will be the subject of debate and revision over the coming months, would fund surface transportation programs up to \$450 billion over the next six years. The bill also includes a massive restructuring of current highway programs and would consolidate and eliminate over 100 programs within the Department of Transportation. Committee Chairman James Oberstar (D-Minn.) and Ranking Member John Mica (R-Fla.) introduced a "blueprint" for the committee's proposal, and expect to introduce the actual legislative text this week prior to consideration of the bill on Wednesday in the Highways and Transit Subcommittee. The blueprint does not address the issue of rest area commercialization which is, in effect, a positive step toward maintaining the ban.

Additional provisions in the blueprint of interest to NATSO members include:

- The elimination of the Interstate Oasis program
- Restrictions on tolling of existing interstate highways
- The establishment of an Office of Public Benefit to judge the impact public-private partnership agreements may have on all highway users
- Additional training requirements for drivers in obtaining a commercial drivers license
- Increased requirements for drivers transporting hazardous materials, including fuel
- Electronic monitoring for drivers to log hours of service requirements
- Possible action requiring purging system on wetline trucks

One major issue not addressed in the blueprint was how to pay for the increased spending in the legislation. Any action related to increasing fuel taxes will come from the House Ways and Means Committee, which will hold a hearing this week to discuss the current needs of our highway system.

Introduction of the legislation is a first step in the legislative process, and NATSO will be engaged throughout the process to voice NATSO members' priorities and concerns.