

July 27, 2015

Dear FULL SENATE:

The undersigned agricultural groups would like to register our support for the Senate's multi-year surface transportation legislation. We appreciate your recognition that infrastructure and transportation policy are vitally important to our nation's competitiveness and economic well-being, including the movement of agricultural products and crop inputs. We urge all members to vote yes on this important piece of legislation.

The bipartisan Senate highway bill contains numerous provisions that will help agriculture producers get their products to market in an efficient manner.

Port Performance Act – Beginning with section 31301 – Ensures regular port performance metric collection and reporting that agriculture shippers need to be competitive in international markets.

Petitions for Regulatory Relief – Section 32201 – Provides permanent Hours of Service exemptions for agriculture producers and ensures a timely and efficient process to seek future exemptions.

Commercial Driver Access – Section 32403 – Creates a pilot program that would allow states to form compacts to allow CDL drivers between 18-21 to drive across state lines (currently must be 21, even though 49 states allow drivers under 21 to hold CDLs).

Endorsements – Section 33101 – Provides an exemption to a hazardous materials endorsement for custom harvesters and other similar equipment to allow the operation of vehicles providing fuel for agriculture operations.

Rail – Beginning Section 35001 – There are many provisions that would be helpful for agriculture generally, but can be explained most simply as the assurance that there is a timely and efficient freight rail network in the future by addressing ECP and PTC.

National Freight Program – Sec. 43001 – A new program, the National Freight Program, is distributed by formula and will provide funds to all states to enhance the movement of goods, reduce costs, and improve the performance for businesses. The program will expand flexibility for both rural and urban areas to designate key freight corridors that match regional goods movement on roads. It will improve efforts to identify projects with a high return on investment through state freight plans and state advisory committees.

Assistance for Major Projects Program (AMPP) – Sec. 44002 – The second new program, the Assistance for Major Projects Program, creates a competitive grant program to provide funds to major projects of high importance to a community, a region, or the nation. The program includes a set-aside for rural areas and ensures an equitable geographic distribution of funds.

Surface Transportation Program – Sec.11004 – This section modifies the percentage of Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds to be suballocated on the basis of population from 50 to 55

percent. Increases the amount set-aside from STP funds for bridges and broadens the set-aside eligibility to include any bridge not located on the National Highway System. Twenty five percent of our nation's bridges require significant repair or cannot handle current traffic demands. At the present rate of funding, it will take another 26 years before the approximately 62,000 bridges currently classified as structurally deficient can be repaired or replaced. That is why it is vital that we dedicate additional funding to bridge projects. These are the bridges that school buses drive on to carry our children to school every day and the bridges that freight trucks access to deliver farm inputs and agricultural commodities to market.

The U.S. economy and all Americans, particularly rural Americans, require a surface transportation infrastructure network that can keep pace with growing demands. A long term commitment to prioritize and invest in our aging infrastructure is essential to achieve this goal.

We applaud your efforts in putting this legislation together and we look forward to working with the Senate and the House as we come to agreement on a multi-year bill. We encourage you to consider including language that is also an important issue for the agriculture community which is allowing an increase in the weight tolerances for heavier trucks that would provide additional efficiencies in the transportation of agricultural products that our members haul.

We look forward to working with you in supporting the aforementioned provisions and urge you to vote "Yes" on this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

Agricultural and Food Transporters Conference
American Farm Bureau Federation
Association of Equipment Manufacturers
Corn Refiners Association
Institute of Shortening and Edible Oils
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Corn Growers Association
National Cotton Council
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
National Grain and Feed Association
National Milk Producers Federation
National Oilseed Processors Association
National Potato Council
United Fresh Produce Association
U.S. Custom Harvesters
Western Growers