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April 11, 2003

The Honorable Ernest J. Istook, Jr.
Chairman
Subcommittee On Transportation - Treasury Appropriations
House Committee on Appropriations
B-307 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Olver
Ranking Member
Subcommittee On Transportation - Treasury Appropriations
House Committee on Appropriations
B-307 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Istook and Ranking Member Olver,

My highest priority for the FY04 Transportation – Treasury Appropriations bill is securing funding for a new Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON) facility at Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston. The current TRACON is over 30 years old and in desperate need of repair. A new TRACON would give the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) the opportunity to build a facility that will resist Houston’s frequent floods. Temporary sandbags have become a permanent fixture around the TRACON, and every time there is a significant rainfall, workers are forced to use buckets to remove the standing water. Most recently, the facility flooded in July 2002, causing numerous flight delays and cancellations at airports throughout the Houston area.

Additionally, the existing TRACON cannot meet the airspace capacity required by the runway expansion currently under construction. The FAA calls for a 36 percent capacity increase in its Operational Evolution Plan for the Houston Airport System, and this increase is dependent on the timely construction of a new TRACON. The President’s FY04 Budget request for the Houston Area Air Traffic System (HAATS) line item is \$6 million. The money is requested “is requested to continue construction efforts on the new TRACON.” This amount is inadequate to get the new TRACON under construction in 2004, therefore, I am respectfully requesting an additional \$30 million above the \$6 million contained in the President’s Budget.

My second highest priority is obtaining \$15 million for an air cargo inspection demonstration program at Bush Intercontinental Airport. The money would be used to purchase, install, and operate a Pulsed Fast Neutron Analysis (PFNA) NII system to inspect air cargo at the airport. PFNA is an automatic non-intrusive detection system that screens for explosives, chemical agents, nuclear and other hazardous materials. A test of this technology is needed to determine whether or not it can function in an airport environment, and I support using Bush Intercontinental Airport as the test bed.

My third priority is the continuation of an important freight rail corridor study in Harris County. The study will determine the most efficient way to create high efficiency rail corridors and improve railroad operations, mobility, and economic growth. Specifically, the study involves improving or eliminating more than 1,100 at-grade railroad crossings throughout the County. I am respectfully requesting \$1 million in FY04 to supplement the \$250,000 that Harris County will spend to carry out this study, which includes preliminary engineering and design. The County and the Port of Houston have spent \$500,000 and \$100,000 respectively to pay for the initial phase of the study.

My fourth priority is purchasing four new truck inspection units for the Houston Police Department (HPD), and three new units for the Ft. Worth Police Department (FWPD). These trucks cost \$25,000 apiece, fully outfitted, and are used to perform safety inspections on tractor-trailers. The HPD shuts down one out of every two trucks it stops, and arrests nearly 600 truck drivers per year. The HPD currently has a fleet of 13 trucks, which generate \$800,000 in fines. Texas still leads the nation in truck accidents, and the influx of unsafe Mexican trucks makes the need for these units even greater.

My fifth and final priority is a critical study to measure the severity and location of congestion in the Houston-Galveston region. The study will identify specific "bottleneck" locations and other transportation deficiencies that cause travel delays. It will also identify cost effective "bottleneck removal projects" and traffic management opportunities. I am respectfully requesting \$750,000 in FY04 to supplement the \$500,000 that the Houston-Galveston Area Council is providing in MPO planning funds.

I am also supporting four Texas Department of Transportation Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Deployment projects, in addition to my four high priority requests. The first ITS project request is for \$250,000 to integrate the Port of Houston with Houston TranStar, which will allow truck drivers leaving the port to plan their routes to avoid traffic congestion. The Port of Houston's new Bayport terminal will result in an additional 15,000 trucks per day using area roads, and this project will be invaluable to help alleviate the strain the additional truck traffic will have on the region.

The second ITS project request is for \$1 million to create a wireless network that will integrate wireless cameras for homeland security and incident monitoring. The system will improve maintenance by allowing in-field monitoring of the ITS network, and will allow onsite incident facilitators to update the Regional Incident Management System.

The third ITS project request is for \$700,000 to implement a web-based tracking system for Transportation Management and Emergency Management. The system will allow for management operations to track resources and monitor actions taken during flooding, hurricane evacuation, or terrorist attack. It would also integrate ITS devices into the system and allow the status of those devices to be checked and updated without having dedicated software.

The fourth ITS project request is for \$500,000 to integrate and implement DYNASMART-X, CLAIRE, and RHODES at TranStar to perform dynamic traffic management. DYNASMART-X is being developed by the University of Texas at Austin and will predict traffic information and recommend routing strategies based on that information. CLAIRE, a tool acquired by FHWA, will then use the predictive traffic information to recommend traffic management strategies. RHODES, an adaptive control system being developed by the University of Arizona for FHWA, will update the signal timing at selected major intersections in real time according to its predicted traffic flows.

The fifth and final ITS project request is for \$175,000 to develop a regional dispatch system using geographic information systems (GIS) on Houston TranStar consoles to dispatch the closest unit in the region to the incident scene of a call-for-service. Computer Aided Dispatching (CAD) will allow supporting dispatchers to share TranStar resources and exchange incident records directly.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of my requests.

Sincerely,



John Culberson
Member of Congress

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