



The Alliance for I-69 Texas

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I-69 Supporters Urge Funding of FASTLANE Grants for I-69 Projects

WASHINGTON – More than 20 representatives of Texas communities and a member of the Texas Transportation Commission were on Capitol Hill this week urging federal officials to continue and accelerate the ongoing development of Interstate 69.

Local leaders participating as members of the Alliance for I-69 Texas pressed for federal approval of federal grants for two specific Texas projects that will improve freight movement on segments of I-69. The Texas Department of Transportation is seeking funding under the FASTLANE grant program for the I-35/I-69W interchange project in Laredo and for a portion of SH 99 which will connect I-69 directly to the Port of Houston.

The FASTLANE program was established as part of the FAST Act, the five-year federal transportation bill passed by Congress last year. This program will provide \$4.5 billion over five years in competitive grants or credit assistance to nationally and regionally significant freight and highway projects.

The I-69 Alliance delegation led a larger group from I-69 national route states including Kentucky, Indiana and Michigan. Texas Transportation Commissioner Jeff Austin joined Nueces County Judge Loyd Neal, chairman of the Alliance for I-69 Texas, to lead the Texas delegation which included mayors, county judges, port authority officials and local business leaders from Texas communities.

Participants provided a state-by-state progress update at the 3rd annual meeting of the I-69 Congressional Caucus which includes members of Congress from all eight states along the I-69 national corridor. Caucus co-chairs Congressman Blake Farenthold (TX-27) and Congressman Henry Cuellar (TX-28) led the discussion.

The multi-state I-69 delegation had 46 meetings with individual members of Congress and their staffs including a session with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky and House Transportation Committee Chairman Bill Shuster of Pennsylvania. They also met with Deputy Secretary of Transportation Victor Mendez and Jeffrey Lindley, deputy administrator for the FHWA Office of Operations.

Judge Loyd Neal said the delegation also encouraged Congress to identify additional funding sources for the FAST Act which authorized spending for five years but was only funded for two years. The FAST Act includes new funding programs that will enable investment in freight highway infrastructure projects like I-69.

Attending from the Coastal Bend were: Nueces County Judge Loyd Neal, Port of Corpus Christi Authority Chairman Charles Zahn, and City of Corpus Christi Director of Intergovernmental Relations Tom Tagliabue.

Interstate 69 in Texas is being developed as a series of incremental upgrades to existing highways following US 59 from Texarkana to Houston and south to Victoria. In South Texas there are three branches of the I-69 System including US 59 leading to Laredo, US 281 south to McAllen, and US 77 from Victoria to Corpus Christi and on to Brownsville. A total of 161 miles in Texas have been signed as I-69 and another 47 miles has been added as Interstate 2 which connects I-69E and I-69C in the Rio Grande Valley.

Since 2010, the Texas Transportation Commission has programmed a total of \$1.47 billion in funded I-69 system projects that have been built or will be completed over the next few years.