

Update



Gulf Coast Strategic Highway Coalition

A Multi-State Coalition Supporting Highway Improvements • Texas - Louisiana - Mississippi

June 4, 2020

☐ **INTERSTATE 14 DESIGNATION BILL** – We continue to believe that the best chance for passing the I-14 Expansion Bill, [H.R. 2220](#), is as a component of the FAST Act reauthorization. On June 3 the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee put a proposed \$494 billion reauthorization bill developed by the majority. The bill is scheduled for mark-up on June 17th and a vote on the House floor on June 30th. The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee previously passed a \$287 billion highway program reauthorization bill. Additional Senate committees with jurisdiction still must develop the safety and transit portions of the Senate bill before consideration on the Senate floor. Following votes by the House and Senate, considerable negotiations will be needed to conference the two versions of the reauthorization bill.

The situation in Washington remains fluid and progress on transportation legislation and funding this year is unpredictable. Still, there is pressure on Congress to take action before the FAST Act expires at the end of September. As always, the bill is expected to be slowed by a lack of “pay-fors”. Neither the House or Senate have concrete proposals to finance the increase in transportation investment. Therefore, one or more straight extensions of the FAST Act are possible, carrying the reauthorization decision and the I-14 multi-state expansion legislation into 2021.

☐ **GARY BUSHELL RETIREMENT** – Health challenges have forced the retirement of Gary Bushell as executive director of the Gulf Coast Strategic Highway Coalition.



“I have enjoyed this work immensely, and especially those very capable volunteers I have had the pleasure of knowing over the years,” Bushell wrote in his letter of resignation.

Bushell has been involved in the I-14 Initiative since its inception in 2002 serving as program coordinator, chief strategist, government relations representative and executive director.

“In his consultant role Gary Bushell has been an ever-present part of our effort. His dedication and determination has been essential in the long journey toward making I-14 a reality and in the effort to realize improved connectivity for the U.S. military,” said John P. Thompson, I-14 Coalition founder and board chairman. Bushell was the originator of the idea of a strategic highway system that would enhance the military value of DOD installations by better connecting them to each other along an east-west corridor and to strategic deployment seaports on the Gulf Coast. He coined the “Forts-to-Ports” brand.

Bushell has also resigned as board chairman of the Transportation Advocates of Texas (TAoT), a statewide advocacy group which he helped to found in 2011 as a representative of the I-14 Coalition.

TAoT has played a valuable role in significantly expanding state investment in highway infrastructure.

Thompson has conferred on Bushell a new title as Executive Director Emeritus of the Coalition and the organization intends to continue seeking Bushell’s valued advice and counsel.

Meyers & Associates will continue as Washington representative for the Coalition and Don Rodman’s role will expand to include state issues along with communications and administration. Thompson is recommending that the Coalition not add to the consulting team at this time in light of ongoing uncertainty. The chairman and other Coalition members will fill in with support from staff.

☐ **STATE HIGHWAY FUNDING** - Traditional funding for highway projects is taking a big hit nationwide, including Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi. The pandemic is resulting in lower fuel consumption and a drop in state and federal fuel taxes. Oil & gas production taxes and general sales taxes also help support road programs in Texas and both are down sharply. Transportation leaders and advocacy groups like TAoT are asking Congress for a \$50 billion funding backstop to help states cope with the drop in revenues.

☐ **SAN ANGELO** – A virtual public meeting will be held starting at 5 p.m. June 18 and running through July 3 as part of the route study of a relief route around the north side of San Angelo. The selected alternative will be the future I-14 route alignment. Meeting materials including a presentation video, preliminary concepts, exhibits and an online comment form will be available online at: <https://sanangeloreliefroute.transportationplanroom.com/>

☐ **I-14 CENTRAL TEXAS PROGRESS** – Work is now underway on a \$45 million contract to widen I-14 from 4 to 6 lanes in Bell County.



This photo shows road base construction for new lanes and work on widening the Nolan Creek bridge, 7 miles west of I-35.

In March, TxDOT awarded a \$36.6 million contract for improvements to US 385 in Crane County south of Odessa. This is part of the proposed I-14 designation expansion bill that would authorize a future interstate connector between I-20 and I-10 in the Permian Basin.

☐ **NEW MAILING ADDRESS** – We have a new mailing address: 5101 Dominica Lane, Fort Worth, Texas 76244