

# High Priority Projects Program

## Issue

Section 1701 of the 2005 Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Equitable Transportation Efficiency Act – A Legacy for Users (PL 109-203) included close to \$15 billion in funding for High Priority Projects. At least \$1 billion of this funding is for projects that are readily identifiable as bicycle, pedestrian, and trail projects. There are numerous potential obstacles to these projects being implemented. **Members of Congress should ensure State Departments of Transportation implement these projects.**

## Status

Section 1701 lists thousands of individual High Priority Projects and an associated dollar amount for each of them. There is no schedule provided for when these projects will be implemented. The legislation allocates the expenditure of 20 percent of the \$15 billion (\$2.96 billion) in each of the next five years – but doesn't specify which projects will be completed in a particular year.

## Background

Much of the media attention that followed the passage of this legislation focused on High Priority Projects and in particular the suggestion that

the funds would be better used for hurricane relief or for “real” transportation projects.

These projects are often requested by individual Members of Congress without the support or knowledge of the State Department of Transportation – it is possible that the state DOT will consider the project less of a priority and even a burden that they are reluctant to implement.

There are also at least two ways in which funding for these projects might disappear. First, there is usually a difference between the amount of money that is authorized by Congress to be spent on transportation projects each year and the amount that is actually appropriated to be spent. The difference has to be made up somehow, and not funding a High Priority Project might be one of those ways.

Second, states have been asked twice in the past year to return to Washington those funds that they have been given in the past but have not yet spent. This rescission process could result in states sending back unspent funds in program areas such as the Transportation Enhancement, Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality and other programs, or High Priority Projects. Either way, the bike, pedestrian or trail project you've been waiting for might not happen.