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Bush signs \$286 billion transpo.

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President George W. Bush signed a \$286 billion transportation bill at a Caterpillar facility in Illinois Aug. 10, which will increase funding in Colorado by more than \$2.45 billion.

The Safe, Accountable and Efficient Transportation Equity Act, a Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) designates the Heartland Express trade corridor through Eastern Colorado and will allow for the completion of the high-priority Great Plains Trade Corridor that will run through the United States from Mexico to Canada.

"This road system that we have is going to be modernized through the Transportation Equity Act," Bush said from the Caterpillar's facility in Montgomery, Ill. "It provides more than \$286 billion over six years to upgrade our nation's network of roads and bridges and mass transit systems. The transportation act will finance needed road improvements, and will ease traffic congestion in communities all across this country."

The bill was passed by a vote of 412-8 in the House and 91-4 in the Senate, after the two Congressional branches worked out their differences in a conference committee. The Colorado Congressional delegation was united in its support of the bill.

As a result of the bill, Colorado will receive 92 cents for every dollar of gas taxes the state pays to the federal government. Since 1998, the state has seen a return of 90.5 cents for every dollar sent to the federal government.

Colorado will see a 46 percent increase in transportation funding, the highest increase of any state.

"More than three years of hard work and negotiations on the transportation bill have paid off," said Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., who helped draft the final version of the bill as a member of the conference committee. "The Heartland Express trade route is of great importance to eastern Colorado. The



SUBMITTED PHOTO

President George W. Bush signs the Transportation Equity Act at the Caterpillar facility in Montgomery, Ill., Aug. 10. Joining the President are, front row from left, Rep. Ray LaHood, R-Ill.; Rep. Melissa L. Bean, D-Ill.; Rep. Jim Oberstar, D-Minn.; Rep. Tom Petri, R-Wis.; Sen. Kit Bond, R-Mo.; U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta; Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert, R-Ill.; Rep. Bill Thomas, R-Calif.; and Rep. Bobby Rush, D-Ill.

route will facilitate additional trade and tourism, bringing additional dollars to the Eastern Plains."

In March, Allard and Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, R-Colo., introduced legislation to designate State Highway 71 from the Nebraska state line to Limon, and I-76 from Denver to Brush, as the Colorado portion of the Heartland Express.

The Heartland Express ends in Rapid City, Iowa, and connects to the Ports-to-Plains corridor that runs between Texas and Denver along Highway 287 and I-70.

Under SAFETEA-LU, \$5 million is provided for improvements of interchanges and road construction along the Heartland Express.

"The nation benefits from completion of this international trade corridor with better prices for goods and services, as well as access to more markets for our domestic products," Musgrave said. "My district will benefit from the economic development, improved infrastructure and added jobs. Finally,

drivers around the state benefit from safer roads because of less traffic congestion."

As a member of the Senate Subcommittee on Housing and Transportation, Allard worked to change the funding formulas used to allocate transportation dollars over the five-year life of the bill.

"A major aspect of this change is that fast-growing states, such as Colorado, will now be at an advantage rather than a disadvantage," Allard said. "I made this change so states that are growing, like our state, will benefit by receiving increased funding. This recognizes the ever-increasing contributions that states like Colorado make to the highway trust fund, and, most importantly, it makes it possible for Colorado projects to get more funding faster than they ever have before."

Allard also worked for changes in the mass transit funding formula. In 1998, 11 cities located primarily on the East Coast received approximately 80 percent of the federal mass transit

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funding.

Under the new law, federal mass transit programs contain a new "Growing States" formula. The new formula will result in a 162 percent increase in mass transit funding for Colorado.

Under the previous version of the bill, Colorado received \$250 million. Under the new law, Colorado stands to receive \$406 million in mass transit funding.

"This will be extremely helpful with current mass transit projects, such as FasTracks in the Denver metro area, as well as a number of policy changes in the bill," Allard said.

For instance, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is specifically made eligible for the new program, which is important because Colorado is considering BRT for some of its FasTracks corridors, Allard said.

"This allows local decisionmakers greater flexibility to create the best possible system for Colorado," Allard said.

FasTracks is in line to receive \$925 million in federal funding as the corridors near construction. The next corridor up for construction, the West Corridor, already has received a priority authorization for \$270 million.

SAFETEA-LU also uses incentives to reward projects that come in under budget and on time. Agencies that manage a project under budget will be allowed to keep the savings for other transit projects.

Musgrave's district was allotted \$40 million in highway construction funds. Nearly \$8 million will be provided to reconstruct portions of I-25 from Highway 52 to Highway 14, more than \$6 million to reconstruct portions of Highway 287 from Limon to the Oklahoma border, and more than \$6 million to reconstruct portions of I-76 from E-470 to the Nebraska border.

Additional funding will be used for improvements to I-25 and I-70, a new interchange at Highway 34 and I-25 at Loveland, improved access to Fort Carson in Colorado Springs, and the widening of Highway 50 in southeastern Colorado from Limon to Las Animas.