

Carriers Urge U.S. to Adopt National Transport Strategy

By Daniel W. Guido
Staff Reporter

SAN DIEGO — Several leading trucking executives last week called for the creation of a national transportation policy to help build new highways and replace aging bridges to lessen congestion.

"We have not had a comprehensive national policy since President Eisenhower created the national highway system, and that was a 30-year plan," said Patrick Quinn, pres-

ident of truckload carrier U.S. Xpress Enterprises and chairman of American Trucking Associations. "We need another 30-year plan to address our aging infrastructure."

Similarly, Douglas Duncan, FedEx Freight's chief executive officer, said the nation's infrastructure is a disaster that will soon begin to unfold unless a plan that includes a massive cash investment is created.

"Our infrastructure is starting to creak and groan and will give us big

(See POLICY, p. 39)

Transport Policy Urged

(Continued from p. 1)

problems in the near future," Duncan said.

Adding their voices in favor of a national plan to expand infrastructure investments were: Christopher Lofgren, president of truckload carrier Schneider National Inc.; Wayne Spain, executive vice president of Averitt Express, which runs both truckload and less-than-truckload fleets; and Tom Escott, president of Schneider Logistics.

The officials made their recommendations during various panel discussions Oct. 24 and 25 here at the annual meeting of the Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals.

At the same meeting, Francis Mulvey, a member of the U.S. Surface Transportation Board, said if transportation infrastructure is not rapidly improved, "just-in-time" delivery will become "sometime" delivery.

"We cannot maintain our highway system if we are not willing to spend the money necessary" to improve the highways, and where needed, build new ones, Mulvey said.

Duncan, speaking at a panel on the changing nature of transportation, said if a plan is not developed soon, the inaction "will threaten to constrain your supply chains well into the future."

He said a national policy would have to include an emphasis on new highway and bridge construction, repairs and maintenance of existing roads and bridges, expanded ports and rail facilities and longer-combination vehicles to help ease congestion by allowing more efficient use of trucks.

In order to get a national transportation policy through Congress, Duncan said the entire transportation industry must "quit trying to fight the negatives and ban together instead to make it work."

Supply chain and logistics professionals need to be a part of a combined effort to address long-neglected transportation needs, Duncan said.

Though the need is dire, Duncan said he was "pretty optimistic" that the industry will coalesce around a policy and eventually get it enacted.

Meanwhile, Quinn said that trucking must be proactive when asking Congress for funding for a national transportation plan, instead of "always playing defense. If we never ask for anything, we surely won't get anything."

Quinn and Mulvey were both speakers at a panel on freight

capacity constraints. Mulvey was the moderator of that panel. The panel, which included Duncan, Spain and Escott, was moderated by Howard Abramson, TRANSPORT TOPIC's editorial director.

If the entire freight transportation industry contributes to getting a transportation policy through Congress, it could become the foundation of the next highway funding act in 2009, Quinn said.

"Right now we don't have any plan. Do we really want to wait another 12 to 15 years and then try to deal with crumbling infrastructure," Quinn asked.

Mulvey said the nation's entire freight transportation infrastructure, including highways, rail lines and port facilities, need to be improved and expanded.

"It takes dollars to solve this, and innovative approaches," he said.

There has been talk within the rail industry of creating a trust fund of tax dollars to help freight railroads build new tracks to increase capacity, especially at port areas, Mulvey added.

He said another possible funding source to help the railroads could be investment tax credits.

Any national plan to improve transportation infrastructure needs to include some form of railroad funding or incentives, Mulvey said.

Schneider's Lofgren said new road construction is needed as worsening highway congestion costs trucking time and money.

Currently, about a quarter of a driver's time is wasted, including time spent in traffic jams, he said.

Averitt's Spain said transportation spending should be used to improve infrastructure and lessening congestion at the nation's ports.

"Carriers need to be able to get in and out of the ports easier," he said.

Escott, who runs Schneider's logistics division, said building additional inland distribution centers could decrease port congestion. At such centers, containers hauled by rail from the port are transferred to trucks or other trains.

But Escott said that in Southern California, home to the nation's busiest ports, there "is no rail solution . . . that [alone] will solve the congestion problem."

A national transportation policy will need to include an expansion of roads around the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, and at other West Coast ports, he said.