



The Republican.

Funding for WMass approved in House

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TRANSPORTATION BILL

The transportation bill approved last night by the U.S. House of Representatives would provide the following: \$1 million to install for fiber optics along I-91 in the Pioneer Valley; \$500,000 to improve Edward Street in Springfield; \$300,000 to update precision equipment at Westfield Vocational Technical High School; \$265,000 toward building an arts center annex of the Amherst Cinema; \$250,000 for Camp Atwater, run during the summer by the Urban League of Springfield; \$800,000 for the Franklin Regional Transit Center in Greenfield; \$100,000 to the University of Massachusetts to develop software for the state to use to survey landscape and design new roads; \$900,000 to improve Route 116 in Amherst, and \$100,000 to build affordable housing at the site of the former Northampton State Hospital.

WASHINGTON - A transportation spending bill that would give Western Massachusetts hefty federal subsidies, including \$900,000 to improve Route 116 in Amherst and \$500,000 to renovate Edward Street near the new federal courthouse in Springfield was approved late last night by a 268-153 vote in the U.S. House of Representatives.

U.S. Rep. John W. Olver, D-Amherst, the chair of the House subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, described the \$104.4 billion bill as "bipartisan and fiscally responsible."

"Each year the president's budget arrives with severe cuts to vital programs, such as housing vouchers, Community Development Block Grants and Amtrak," Olver said. "We have restored the deepest cuts and focused on making core programs whole and making them function better rather than starting with a lot of new initiatives."

The spending plan is \$4.1 billion more than the president's proposal for transportation, housing and urban development for fiscal 2008 which begins Oct. 1.

Earlier in the day, the Amherst Democrat had staved off an attempt by a House Republican to slash Amtrak subsidies. U.S. Rep. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., argued that taxpayers should not have to subsidize the rail service that loses money every year.

The White House slashed Amtrak funding by \$400 million. Olver's committee restored that cut and added another \$100 million for Amtrak. "There is not any passenger rail system anywhere in this world that operates without some operating subsidy," Olver said.

By a 328-94 vote, the House protected Amtrak's funding.

In introducing the bill, Olver said that for the first time, the bill includes \$50 million for state matching grants for intercity passenger rail systems and another \$35 million for the rail line relocation and improvement program.

The bill protects the \$38 million that Congress has already approved for the Union Station project in Springfield, but the funding is frozen by the Federal Transit Authority until city officials present an economically viable project to the federal agency. A hotel, shops and transportation center are proposed for

the project.

U.S. Rep. Richard E. Neal, D-Springfield, said preserving those funds was critical.

"I can't overstate how important it is to protect this money, they can't give it away," Neal said. "John Olver did a good job on this for us."

Neal said that the bill gives \$250,000 to Camp Atwater, the nation's oldest African-American owned and operated summer youth camp. It is run by the Urban League of Springfield and is located in North Brookfield.

The spending bill adds \$330 million above the administration's request for Section 8 tenant-based housing subsidies to a total of \$16.4 billion.

The Senate has yet to approve its spending plans for transportation, housing and urban development. Once completed, both chambers will meet in conference to write a final bill.

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