

Rep. Ellen Tauscher Introduces Commuter Emergency Relief Legislation

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Rep. Ellen Tauscher Introduces Commuter Emergency Relief Bill

Legislation makes mass transportation services provided in the wake of a highway emergency eligible for federal reimbursement

Washington , DC – Today, Rep. Ellen Tauscher (D-Calif., 10) introduced the Commuter Emergency Relief Act to make all mass transportation services provided as a result of highway emergencies eligible for reimbursement by the federal government.

The legislation is retroactive to April 29, 2007, meaning the costs associated with providing free transit services on April 30 in the wake of the MacArthur Maze meltdown and the operation of the 511 system in the Bay Area during that time would be eligible for reimbursement. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) has estimated the costs associated with this to be \$2.7 million.

Currently, under the Federal Highway Administration’s Emergency Relief program, the State of California is eligible to be reimbursed only for repairs made to a damaged highway. The costs associated with offering free transit services such as BART and AC Transit in the immediate aftermath of an emergency are not eligible for federal reimbursement – except for ferry boat service which is explicitly eligible for reimbursement under current law. The inability of states to be reimbursed for these transit costs currently severely limits the ways in which states and regions can respond to these types of disasters.

“When there’s a catastrophe on a major artery, everyone is forced to switch gears and make changes that affect their daily lives. In the case of the MacArthur Maze meltdown, thousands of commuters needed to find alternate routes to and from work, and in a record number of cases, that involved people getting out of their cars and onto mass transportation,” said Rep. Tauscher.

In order to correct this deficiency in law, Rep. Tauscher’s legislation would simply change current law to allow for the reimbursement of costs associated with offering mass transportation services and the operation of traveler information services like 511. This is a reasonable and much needed change to the Emergency Relief program.

“Last April, Bay Area residents used transit services in record numbers and by doing so ensured that congestion related to the Maze closure was not nearly as severe as originally anticipated. This kind of response should be encouraged by the incentive of reimbursement but unfortunately, under current law, states and regions are discouraged from doing so. We need to make the Bay Area’s quick response an example of the way to keep cities up and running in an emergency,” Rep. Tauscher added.

Rep. Tauscher is introducing the legislation today with 16 cosponsors: Barbara Lee, Doris Matsui, Jerry McNerney, Grace Napolitano, Bob Filner, Peter Stark, George Miller, Tom Lantos, Anna Eshoo, Zoe Lofgren, Lynn Woolsey, Mike Thompson, Lois Capps, Linda Sanchez, Diane Watson and Sam Farr.

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