



ARC

*Alliance for
Rail Competition*

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News Update

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Update from the Executive Director

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ARC Membership Conference Call

A conference call was held Thursday afternoon between members, plus organizations who work with ARC, and our Washington team, Meyers & Associates, to discuss recent developments in Congress pertaining to the shipper legislation (H.R. 2125).

Rick Meyers gave an overview of meetings on Capitol Hill. Almost 40 members from 15 states were visited by Meyers & Associates so far this month. Rick provided a detailed analysis of feedback from each member, including potential co-sponsors and potential “yes” votes on the House floor. Special attention was paid to those members who are still seeking contact from constituents. Many members appear willing to support us, either by co-sponsoring the legislation or voting with us if and when the legislation goes on the floor, but these members need to hear from their constituents in order to make their support official.

Meyers & Associates also reported that a House hearing is anticipated some time in September, after the August recess. It was reiterated that those members who have already signed on to sponsor H.R. 2125 should still be contacted by constituents to express appreciation and reiterate continued urgency of the issue.

Mike Scanlan of PPL and Kevin Acker of DuPont reported on developments regarding a NITL proposal to oppose the shipper legislation. The opposition was a part of a “Proposed Rail Compromise Agreement” that NITL prepared together with the railroads. Thanks to the opposition from many shippers, the proposal was tabled at the last meeting. The proposal is expected to be raised again during the next meeting of NITL’s Rail Committee on August 2, as well as at the full NITL meeting in November. All shippers are asked to oppose this proposal. This proposal has important long-term adverse overtones. If H.R. 2125 is stalled due to opposition from a shipper/rail group (i.e. NITL), all momentum will be lost and it will be impossible to convince members to take a lead on any similar shipper legislation in the future.

Future conference calls are expected to be held on a routine basis, as dictated by activity. All ARC members are encouraged to participate in order to obtain the most detailed, current information about our efforts. We appreciate everyone who participated in this call. If you have specific questions/comments about grassroot efforts with your members of Congress, please email to Terry Whiteside at TWhiteside@railcompetition.org.

Walz Rail Study Amendment Accepted by the House Agriculture Committee

Late Thursday evening, when the House Agriculture completed their mark-up of the new farm bill, language was included that would mandate a new study by the Department of Agriculture on railroad issues. The amendment would require the Secretary of Agriculture, in consultation with the Secretary of Transportation, to conduct a study of the "movement of agricultural products, domestically produced renewable fuels, and domestically produced resources for the producers of electricity for rural America".

The amendment was vigorously supported by the National Farmers Union, National Association of Wheat Growers, American Soybean Association, National Barley Growers Association, American Sugarbeet Growers Association, United States Beet Sugar Association, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the US Dry Pea and Lentil Council, and ARC.

The study, which is to be submitted to Congress within 9 months of the enactment of the farm bill, was not included in the final package easily. When first presented to the committee by Cong. Walz (D-MN), several members of the committee felt that such a study should not be limited to rail, but also include other modes of transporting agricultural products, such as truck and barge. Committee Chairman Peterson (D-MN) also wanted to ensure that the amendment had been approved by the Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. Mr. Waltz assured the Chairman that T&I Chairman Oberstar had approved the amendment, but only for a study limited to rail.

In response, Chairman Peterson asked a group of interested members to meet with Chairman Oberstar and ask if he objected to other modes of transportation being included in the study, per the request of the Committee's ranking member Congressman Goodlatte (R-VA). The members who requested to be given this task were: Cong. Walz (D-MN), Cong. Herseth-Sandlin (D-SD), Cong. Pomeroy (D-ND), Cong. Boustany (R-LA), Cong. Conaway (R-TX), and Cong. McCarthy (R-CA). Later in the day, it was reported to the committee that Chairman Oberstar asked for two minor changes to the language, and would not agree to the study being expanded beyond rail without entering into his committee's jurisdiction. The committee then took some time to debate the amendment, particularly on the need for such a study. The USDA representatives present at the discussion were concerned about being able to complete a meaningful study within 6 months. As a result, the committee amended the time for completion to nine months. Finally, the amendment was accepted by a unanimous voice vote after Cong. Goodlatte and others expressed their disappointment that the study did not also include truck and barge transportation but agreed to defer to Chairman Oberstar's conditions.

The farm bill package will be debated and voted on by the full House next week.