



Agriculture Gives DOT an Earful Regarding Transportation Priorities

February 3, 2009

Today AFTC participated in a half-day listening session titled “Perspectives on Tomorrow’s Transportation,” and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) at DOT headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Today’s session brought together agriculture industry representatives in the Washington, D.C., area to discuss their perspectives on transportation issues. In addition to AFTC, representatives of various agriculture organizations who participated in today’s session included the American Farm Bureau Federation, the National Association of Wheat Growers, the National Cotton Council, the USA Rice Federation, the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, the Agricultural Retailers Association, the American Soybean Association, the National Grain and Feed Association, the North American Millers Association, and the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture along with staff of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Thanks to its close working relationships with USDA and other agriculture groups, AFTC was the only transportation group included in the discussion. Other modes of transportation were not represented.

The DOT representatives opened the session by describing it as an open forum to hear directly from each organization on their views regarding transportation priorities and went around the room to give each person an opportunity to speak. Several organization representatives who spoke before the views of AFTC were presented expressed their support for maintaining the agricultural exemption to hours of service regulations and presented this position independently and without prompting.

AFTC followed up by emphasizing the importance of the exemption to allow flexibility during planting and harvesting seasons while adding that safety of highways is vitally important to the trucking industry. Other common themes were the need for adequate maintenance of rural roads and increased trucking productivity through size and weight reforms to ensure efficient movement of agricultural commodities. Agriculture organizations also focused on their frustrations with rail and barge rates and service, among other issues.

The session hosted by FHWA’s Office of Transportation Policy Studies begins a series of meetings described as an effort to reach out to non-traditional groups. These include agricultural organizations, low-income citizens, non-drivers and transportation professionals. These listening sessions are intended to help FHWA develop a better understanding of the issues that can influence transportation decision-making.