

Washington, DC – Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) spoke out in favor of increased federal funding for Amtrak and defended the federal New Starts program during debate on the House floor this week. The House was debating legislation funding the U.S. Department of Transportation's programs and projects for fiscal year 2005.

"In community after community transit systems are proving to be the most cost-effective ways of reducing congestion, far more effective than spending a similar amount simply widening roads as has been the case in the past," Blumenauer stated in defense of the New Starts program. "Critics on the House floor today claim that the New Starts program is oversubscribed. That is correct, but this should be taken as a sign of its success. I would think that that is a signal, a signal about the popularity and the importance of these programs across the country.

"New Starts is an extraordinarily popular and important program for communities across the country, including some that may not leap to mind for people thinking about multimodal transportation systems. In Houston, Texas for example, voters just this last fall, against formidable political opposition, decided to extend the City's light rail system. Funding for the New Starts program is not keeping pace with demand."

Blumenauer finished his speech with a call for increased funding for Amtrak. "Today's debate continues an ongoing drama in Congress where the administration proposes to undercut Amtrak, where there are proposals here in the House to chop it down even further, but it is always restored because it is something the public understands is an essential part of our transportation infrastructure," said Blumenauer. "It is critical in corridors like in the Northeast. It is something that we have historically starved and underfunded. We have spent less in total of Amtrak's entire history than we do in one year of highway spending.

"I would hope that we not get involved with that charade this time where we go through the motions of cutting Amtrak funding or even eliminating it. While I am confident cuts will ultimately be reinstated, this undercuts the effective administration that we see with the new director, David Gunn, who is the best I have seen since I have been in Congress. They deserve better and so does the rail passenger public."

A vote on the fiscal year 2005 Transportation-Treasury Appropriations bill is expected next week. For a full transcript on Blumenauer's speech visit his website at Blumenauer.house.gov.