

**Rep. David Price**  
**Testimony**  
**House Rules Committee**  
**Fiscal Year 2013 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development**  
**House Appropriations Bill**  
**June 21, 2012**

I understand that the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee objects to a provision I authored that was included in the House Fiscal Year 2013 (FY13) Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill at full committee markup earlier this week. I would like to take this opportunity to explain the provision and my intent, and request that you protect this important provision in the bill.

The provision in question would reallocate funds that are languishing at USDOT and put them to work on an important program that improves safety, enhances mobility, and creates jobs. The provision is deficit-neutral and investment-wise, and it does not affect the baseline figures of our transportation authorization bill.

Many of my colleagues may recall that SAFETEA-LU included a \$90 million set-aside for the deployment of magnetic levitation (maglev) technology, which is a fixed guideway passenger rail system capable of moving passengers. At the time we enacted SAFETEA-LU in 2005, there were four areas in the country that were interested in utilizing this technology. The language designated half of the funds for use in Nevada, and half of the funds for use East of the Mississippi. Seven years later, no projects have made it beyond environmental review, and none are moving forward. As a result, 90% of the maglev funding – currently \$83.6 million – is in indefinite detention.

The provision that the Appropriations Committee adopted during mark-up – and I would note for the record that it was accepted by the majority – would simply reallocate the unobligated funds in the maglev program to the existing FHWA program that provides grants to eliminate hazards at highway-railway grade crossings on high speed rail corridors.

Let me take a moment to describe to you the pressing need for these critical safety funds. There are over 225,000 combined public and private grade crossings across the country, and a collision occurs at one of these crossings 4,000 times per year! Last year alone, there were 236 fatal grade crossing collisions resulting in 265 fatalities. More than Half of the Members sitting on this Committee (six) – from both sides of the aisle – had such a fatality in their district last year.

The states have been doing their part to address grade crossing safety, but the federal funding stream has been inadequate both to meet the demand or the need. Over the last three years, this program received nearly 70 applications totaling about \$100 million but had only \$30 million in funding to allocate.

We know these funds make a difference. Since the grade crossing elimination program was established (in 1978), the collision rate has fallen every year, and has declined by 80% overall. By investing dollars to relocate and improve roads and railroad lines and to add signals and warning signs at crossings, we can mitigate the adverse effects of rail traffic on safety and motor vehicle traffic flow and greatly reduce the incidence of grade crossing accidents.

In this era of scarce fiscal resources, when we have significant unmet public safety needs, it is unconscionable to let no-year money sit indefinitely. If the authorizers believe they have claim to this funding, then I would ask why, having had numerous chances to reallocate this funding, they have failed to do so. We have the methods to improve safety and prevent tragic rail accidents; this provision would simply supply the means.

I would also note that putting unused maglev funds to work takes advantage of their multiplier effect: By improving public safety at highway-railway grade crossings, we also enhance mobility for both freight and passenger rail traffic, and create jobs.

I urge my colleagues to support and protect this important provision in the THUD appropriations bill, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.