

Shuster Intrigued By Roadwork Rationale

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Hosting the 2002 Winter Olympics is not only in Utah's interest; it's in the national interest as well.

At least that is why Rep. Bud Shuster, R-Pa., said he is intrigued by a proposal from Utah Gov. Mike Leavitt that all U.S. cities hosting Olympic Games be given priority federal funding for transportation infrastructure. Shuster met Monday with Leavitt, Salt Lake Mayor Deedee Corradini and Utah GOP Reps. Enid Greene and Jim Hansen to discuss Utah's transportation needs and tour proposed I-15 expansion and renovation projects along the Wasatch Front.

The I-15 rebuilding will widen and reconstruct the freeway for 16 miles from Sandy to downtown Salt Lake City at a cost estimated at \$800 million to \$1 billion. The completion deadline is targeted for fall 2001.

Leavitt had traveled to Washington, D.C., several times to meet with Shuster, whose committee holds the purse strings over the transportation budget. Shuster's Utah visit was in response to Leavitt's invitation to come to Utah to see in person the state's transportation needs.

Shuster called Leavitt's proposal for priority funding for Olympic cities "an innovative idea," saying there is a national interest at stake when U.S. cities host the Games. That national interest gives merit to the idea that Congress should do more to help host cities meet transportation infrastructure needs.

The proposal would certainly benefit Salt Lake City in the short term, but it would also be the framework for other U.S. cities that host Olympic Games in the future.

The question facing congressional budget-makers is how much state money will have to be matched with federal transportation funds. In a press conference following Monday's meeting, Shuster said discussions to date on Utah's transportation needs have focused on a federal-state ratio of 90-10 or 80-20.

If Utah were to guarantee more than 20 percent funding, "there is a strong feeling that when we have a community step forward and provide more than 20 percent, there should be priority funding," he said.

Any Utah transportation funding package will likely come with the next authorization of the transportation budget, which must be done by October 1997. Given the crucial nature of the I-15 renovations, "it has to be part of that authorization," Leavitt said.