

S.A. leaders seek \$238.8 million for transportation projects

Castro and business groups are in Washington lobbying for bus, streetcar and rail funds.

By Gary Martin

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Published: 11:52 p.m., Monday, February 7, 2011

WASHINGTON — A group of San Antonio business leaders, led by Mayor [Julián Castro](#), spent Monday in the nation's capital seeking millions of dollars for an array of transportation projects from a Congress that has vowed to slash spending.

The lobbying effort, which sought \$238.8 million for such things as a rapid transit bus project and a downtown streetcar system, coincided with a push by President [Barack Obama](#) for investment in infrastructure — a blueprint partially laid out in a speech to the [U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#).

"The cost to business from outdated and inadequate infrastructure is enormous," Obama said. "That's why I want to put more people to work rebuilding crumbling roads, rebuilding our bridges."

San Antonio's priority projects, Castro said, are needed to accommodate an influx of residents in the wake of military and business growth.

"We want to impress upon the administration the importance in investing in our infrastructure," he said.

About 115 San Antonio business leaders are in Washington this week attending an annual three-day lobbying spree organized by the [Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce](#), the [San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce](#) and the [Free Trade Alliance](#). Their push for the money comes as Congress begins its annual appropriations process and as lawmakers consider a transportation reauthorization bill.

Vice President [Joe Biden](#) Jr. and Transportation Secretary [Ray LaHood](#) will speak in Philadelphia today on the importance of infrastructure investment.

LaHood said last week that he was optimistic that lawmakers would respond to administration priorities of mass transit and light rail and pass the reauthorization bill by August.

But Republicans, who control the House, want to cut \$100 billion from spending bills, and leaders from both major political parties have vowed to stop the use of earmarks to fund lawmakers' pet projects.

Nonetheless, Congress is expected to pass a transportation reauthorization bill that would contain billions of dollars to improve and repair roads, bridges and railways nationwide.

A series of field hearings was announced last week by Rep. [John Mica](#), R-Fla., chairman of the [House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee](#). None of the field hearings announced, so far, will be in Texas.

"The best ideas to improve and streamline government programs often come from outside Washington," Mica said. "Before we draft any legislation, these meetings will provide the committee with valuable insight and information."

San Antonio is seeking its share of funding for mass transit projects and improvements, said [Sam Dawson](#), CEO of [Pape-Dawson Engineers](#) and chairman of the Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce board.

"If we don't ask for the money," Dawson said, "someone else is going to get it."

San Antonio wants \$75 million in spending bills for a [VIA Metropolitan Transit](#) rapid transit bus project that would include improved service and a hub for more than one type of transportation. The city is the largest in the country without such a hub, said [David Zachry](#), president of construction company Zachry Corp.

Other project funding sought by city officials includes \$150 million for the downtown streetcar system, \$12 million in infrastructure improvements at Port San Antonio and \$1.8 million for design and land acquisition for a regional rail system to run between San Antonio and Austin.

Jim Greenwood, a vice president with Valero Energy Corp. in San Antonio, said an increase in the state's population in the Census should mean a corresponding increase in a percentage of funds doled out to Texas in the reauthorization bill.

Castro and the business leaders will meet Wednesday with Federal Highway Administrator [Victor Mendez](#), and they plan to talk to various lawmakers while in town.



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