



SOUTHERN LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

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SOUTHERN TRANSPORTATION LEADERS TRAVEL TO PANAMA FOR TOUR AND BRIEFINGS ON PANAMA CANAL EXPANSION

(Atlanta, Georgia) — A delegation of seven state transportation leaders from six Southern states, including Senator Jeff Mullis, chair of the Georgia Senate Transportation Committee (Delegation Leader); Representative Phillip D. "Phil" Owens, chair of the South Carolina House Education and Public Works Committee; Representative Jay Roberts, chair of the Georgia House Transportation Committee; Representative Karen Gaudet St. Germain, chair of the Louisiana House Transportation, Highways, and Public Works Committee; former North Carolina state representative and recently-appointed chair of the North Carolina State Ports Authority Daniel F. McComas; Senator Tommy Williams, chair of the Texas Senate Finance Committee (and until very recently chair of the Texas Senate's Transportation and Homeland Security Committee); and, Senator Frank Wagner, member of the Virginia Senate Transportation Committee, traveled to Panama for high-level briefings on the Panama Canal expansion project. The delegation agenda was designed to reinforce the need for Southern ports to continue essential infrastructure enhancements to accommodate the significantly larger vessels and expanded cargo volumes expected to arrive after the completion of the Panama Canal expansion.

For over a decade now, the Southern Office of The Council of State Governments (CSG), the Southern Legislative Conference (SLC) has focused on the critical role played by Southern ports not only in the economic calculations of the Southern region but also the nation as a whole. The decision by the government of Panama to proceed with the \$5.25 billion expansion project has been touted as one of the most transformative global transportation project currently in progress. Upon completion in 2014, the expanded Panama Canal will facilitate an even greater flow of trade between Asia and the Americas and substantially impact the volume of trade reaching Gulf and East Coast ports in the United States. Georgia is an SLC state that is expected to be impacted directly by the increase in cargo and vessel traffic in the aftermath of the Panama Canal expansion.

The SLC delegation's Panama visit began with a series of briefings and a tour of the Panama Canal Authority. Mr. Jorge L. Quijano, the Administrator and Chief Executive Officer of the Panama Canal Authority, provided a broad overview of the expansion effort and its critical importance in the effective and efficient transfer of cargo between Asia and the Americas. Mr. Rodolfo Sabonge, Vice President, Office of Market Research and Analysis at the Panama Canal Authority, spoke on the role of the Canal's expansion in the context of surging global trade and the contemporary shipping industry trend of deploying substantially larger vessels to take advantage of economies of scale. The SLC delegation received a tour and further briefings on the control tower of the current locks and the construction site of the two new sets of locks, on both the Pacific and Atlantic sides of the Canal.

The SLC delegation also attended a briefing at the U.S. Embassy in Panama on U.S. – Panama political, economic and social linkages, which included reference to the impact of the expansion of the Panama Canal and the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the United States and Panama that was signed into law in October 2011. The briefings at the U.S. Embassy were carried out by Mr. Daniel B. O'Connor, Deputy Political Counselor and Mr. G. Nar Dao, Economic Officer.

Finally, the SLC delegation visited the offices of the American Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Panama (AmCham Panama) for briefings and dialogue on the potential for expanding the economic and financial linkages between Panama and corporate and business interests in the SLC states. Providing information on these topics to the SLC delegation were Mr. C.E. Maurice Belanger, Executive Director of AmCham Panama, Mr. Luis Lagurre, the 2012 President of AmCham Panama, Mr. Edgardo Della Serra, Trade Center Director at AmCham Panama and other business leaders in Panama.