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Peters Approved as Next Transportation Secretary

By Kathleen Hunter, CQ Staff

A Senate panel on Monday approved Mary E. Peters to be the next Transportation secretary, and the full Senate is expected to confirm her before the end of the week.

The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee voted 22-0 in favor of Peters, who garnered bipartisan praise during her Sept. 20 nomination hearing.

Peters, a Republican, would replace Norman Y. Mineta, the nation's longest-serving transportation secretary, who was the lone Democrat in Bush's cabinet.

Mineta stepped down almost three months ago, and several committee members said they wanted to see the post filled by month's end.

An aide to Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., said Senate leaders would try to hold a vote on Peters' confirmation before the week is out.

"It will be good for the country to have her on the job," said Republican John McCain of Arizona, Peters' home state.

Although senators signaled broad support for her, committee members did seek assurances from Peters that she would support transportation policy that was important to each of them.

Highway funding, safety and congestion issues were topics of discussion. Committee members also pressed Peters for her views on Amtrak, freight rail capacity, rural commercial air services and foreign ownership of U.S. airlines.

Frank R. Lautenberg, D-N.J., admonished Peters to ensure that the administration adequately supports all forms of transportation, particularly rail.

"The future transportation needs of our country will not be met by highways alone," Lautenberg said.

Prior to her nomination, Peters headed the Federal Highway Administration from 2001 through 2005 and the Arizona Department of Transportation from 1998 through 2001.

Since November 2005, she has been the national director for transportation policy and consulting at the architectural, engineering and consulting firm HDR Inc.

Peters would be only the second woman transportation secretary, joining Sen. Elizabeth Dole, R-N.C., who led the department from 1983 to 1987.

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