The first day of the CSG Transportation Policy Academy in Washington, D.C. also included a keynote address from Maryland Secretary of Transportation James T. Smith Jr. Smith is a lifelong resident of Baltimore County. He served two terms on the Baltimore County Council, 16 years as an Associate Judge of the Circuit Court for Baltimore County and eight years as County Executive. He spoke about Maryland’s overall approach to transportation and how the passage of a major funding package in 2013 will help them achieve some of his agency’s key goals and projects.
Maryland is among a handful of states in this nation—Virginia, Wyoming, Arkansas, Oregon, Massachusetts and Vermont being part of that group—that have passed significant transportation funding legislation in the last year that has addressed as far as Maryland’s concerned our state’s long-term transportation needs,” Smith told attendees. “We really haven’t had in Maryland in the last four or five years any new transportation projects because there was no money to fund those transportation projects. We all know that transportation projects are no
one-year deal. They cost over multiple years and if you don’t have the funding in place to support those long-term out years, you just don’t do it. And that’s really where Maryland was.”

On Maryland’s approach to congestion...

“We really are looking at a multi-modal approach to handling traffic congestion. Yes it is highways and it is tunnels. But it’s also bike paths and pedestrian paths. It’s also transit. It’s also airports. It’s also the port. And it’s also toll facilities. I mean we’re looking at all of that. But in order to look at all of that, you have to have the resources to back that up.”

On Maryland before the passage of the funding package...

“As far as where we were before the last session of the General Assembly, we were in a position where no new projects had started for four or five years. The prediction was that we would only be able to maintain our existing facilities beginning in 2017. We had some little projects going up that were new but nothing major. …Without the ability to do anything new, we were really stymied.”

On the political leadership that made the legislation possible...

“I give kudos to Gov. Martin O’Malley and to the Lieutenant Governor, Anthony Brown, and also to the leadership of the Maryland General Assembly, President Miller and Speaker Busch and the members of the General Assembly, who decided that they were going to address this issue because it was critical. We all know transportation is more than just getting people from point A to point B or freight from the port to its ultimate destination. It’s jobs, it’s economic development and redevelopment. It’s huge. And they took on this responsibility facing our 2014 elections. And I give them a lot of credit for courage.”

On what the legislation entailed...

“They passed really three pieces of legislation in the last session of the General Assembly. One was the Transportation Infrastructure Investment Act of 2013 and that really provided for the additional funding needed to address our transportation infrastructure needs. It raised our fuel tax, it added a sales tax to our fuel tax and it generated $4.4 billion in new revenues over the next six years and of course continuing into the future. They also passed a piece of legislation that limited the legislature’s ability to divert transportation trust funds to general responsibilities of government. And they also passed legislation which provided for public-private partnerships. … What we’re really trying to do is figure new ways to address government’s responsibility for providing infrastructure.”

On no longer treading water in Maryland...

“All that legislation has made all the difference in my job. In fact, I didn’t take this job until after they passed all that legislation. One thing at this stage of my life that I wasn’t interested in doing was being the head of an organization that was trying to tread water. Because I don’t know what your experience with treading water is but my experience is you can’t do it for a long time.”

By:
Tuesday, November 5, 2013 at 05:54 PM
Tags:
Capitol Comments [3]