House Votes Funds for SST Research

Associated Press

Almost exactly six years after Congress killed the American supersonic transport, the House voted yesterday to spend $15 million for preliminary research into a new SST.

The House approved the $15 million by voice vote as part of a $4.05 billion authorization for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Before sending the bill to the Senate on a 388-to-44 vote, the House amended it to stipulate that no money could be spent for designing or developing a new SST prototype without specific congressional approval.

Supporters said the $15 million on SST research would be for "technology readiness" in case it becomes possible to build an SST that is economically viable and environmentally acceptable.

"We do not propose to build another Concorde," Rep. Dale Milford (D-Tex.) said in reference to the Anglo-French SST.

Opposition to the SST research was led by New York City representatives, who warned the bill could be the first step toward development of an American SST. New York and New Jersey authorities currently are considering whether to let the Concorde land at John F. Kennedy International Airport.

The New York representatives pointed out that the first congressional debate on the SST occurred in 1964 on a provision in an earlier NASA authorization. After many other debates and $1 billion had been spent, Congress halted work on the project on March 18, 1971.

Milford, whose subcommittee reported out the bill, said, "What we are talking about today has nothing to do with the Concorde, which is a fiasco environmentally and economically. What we must do is not allow our own aeronautical industry to fall behind their foreign competitors.

"Someday there will be an advanced supersonic transport flying people around the world that has solved the environmental and economic problems. I want that airplane to be made in America," Milford said.

The report of the Science and Technology Committee that accompanied the bill said that NASA would complete its study of SST technology by September. The study will have "the goal of achieving technology readiness for such an aircraft by the early 1980s," the report said.

"If Congress wants to take up the question of the SST again, it will have the facts to do so," Milford said.

Rep. Theodore Weiss (D-N.Y.) complained that "NASA is being given too much leeway on a program that the Congress has turned thumbs down on."

"We cannot continue to lead the world in the field of aviation if we don't increase the pool of knowledge," Milford replied.