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House Returns Monday; Reauthorization Legislation Uncertain

Representatives return to Washington on Monday to begin the process of addressing the surface transportation reauthorization legislation passed this week by the Senate.

The House was in recess this week, and there were no announcements from its leaders regarding the next steps on getting a reauthorization bill -- or a ninth short-term extension of the 2005 authorization law known as "SAFETEA-LU" -- to the floor.

The House Republican Conference met last week to review the status of [HR 7](#), the American Energy and Infrastructure Jobs Act. ([see March 9 AASHTO Journal story](#)) The five-year, \$260 billion measure cleared the House T&I Committee Feb. 3 but only the energy component has been approved on the House floor.

In a Thursday letter to House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, and House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-Virginia, Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chairwoman Barbara Boxer, D-California, and Senate banking committee Chairman Tim Johnson, D-South Dakota, called for the House to immediately pass a cloned version of the bipartisan Senate transportation bill approved Wednesday. ([see related story](#)) Boxer and Johnson cited the urgency of acting prior to March 31 so that highway and transit programs and revenues do not expire.

Boxer and Johnson copied the letter to all representatives, including a chart that shows the number of jobs in every state that would be saved or created by enacting the Senate bill, [S 1813](#), the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act.

"Nationwide, MAP-21 sustains almost 1.9 million jobs, including over 55,000 jobs in Ohio and almost 40,000 jobs in Virginia," the letter states. "We ask you to immediately take up and pass the Senate's bipartisan transportation bill. The reforms included in MAP-21 improve surface transportation programs by maintaining current funding levels for highways and public transportation, consolidating over two-thirds of all highway programs, eliminating earmarks, establishing a national freight program, improving safety oversight of public transportation, and instituting performance measures and accountability for transportation infrastructure investments. This bill is also fully paid for."

The two senators contend the surface transportation authorization bill is by far the biggest jobs legislation Congress will take up this year.

"It is imperative that Congress pass and the president sign into law this bill by March 31st, because the failure to act means that the nation's surface transportation programs will be shut down," Boxer and Johnson wrote. "The nation simply cannot afford these devastating job losses."

John Horsley, executive director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, spoke to Transportation TV this week on what will occur should Congress fail to approve a short-term extension by March 31. View the interview at www.TransportationTV.org.

Questions regarding this article may be directed to editor@ashtojournal.org.