



House to introduce three-month highway bill extension

By Keith Laing - 03/21/12 01:07 PM ET

The House of Representatives will vote on a three-month extension of highway funding that will extend transportation programs in the United States until June 30.

The announcement comes after House leaders shunned the idea of holding a vote on a two-year, \$109 billion plan that was approved in a bipartisan vote by the Senate last week. It represents a clear defeat for Speaker John Boehner's (R-Ohio) goal of passing a multi-year bill early in this election year.

But House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman John Mica (R-Fla.) said a three-month extension would "ensure continuity of current programs while ... House Republicans continue to work toward a responsible transportation bill that provides long-term certainty, reduces the size of government, eliminates earmarks, and is fully paid for."

Mica made clear the House has no plans to take up the Senate version.

"We continue to believe that linking energy and infrastructure is the responsible thing to do in order to meet our long-term needs," he said in a statement.

Mica's office said the transportation extension would be a clean extension of the current legislation that funds transportation projects, which expired in 2009.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said Tuesday that he did not plan on holding another vote in the Senate on transportation, pointing out that his chamber's version of the highway bill won the votes of 74 senators last week — no small feat in the chamber.

"I plan not to do that," Reid said when he was asked about the possibility of voting on a short-term extension if one is sent over to the Senate by the House.

Democrats stopped short Wednesday of sticking to Reid's hardline, even as they raised the specter of a shutdown that would eclipse the furloughs that were experienced by the Federal Aviation Administration last year if the collection of the federal gas tax, which traditionally funds road and transit projects, is not renewed.

"It's the FAA shutdown on steroids," Senate Environment and Public Committee Chairwoman Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) said in a news conference about the possibility of the gas tax authorization not being renewed by next weekend.

"The FAA bill created and protected about two hundred thousand jobs," she continued. "We're talking about 3 million jobs."

"It's death by 1,000 paper cuts," Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), the third-ranking Democrat in the Senate, added.

"If you keep extending the bill ... it's the death knell of the bill, because the trust fund will be gone," Schumer said. "Every time you extend it, the trust fund gets lower and lower and it'll be gone by...the end of the year."

But when Schumer was asked by The Hill whether he would rather see a short-term extension or an interruption in the collection of the gas tax, he said only, "We're urging them not to put us in that position, or America."

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David Rosenthal 52 minutes ago

There are really 3 issues. Congress has abdicated its responsibility by failing to pass a new bill for almost 3 years. Neither the Senate version (too short) nor the House version (too little money) are acceptable. It's time to act like grown ups, raise the gas tax by 10 cents a gallon and pass a 6 year bill with investment levels the Administration has advocated and include a mandate to have an operating variable mileage tax system in place by the end of that 6 years. Every users group, from truckers to AAA acknowledges and supports a fuel tax increase. Private investment is fine but at its most extravagant projections would fund less than 4% of necessary investment. All those folks who want "free market" (meaning subsidized only for them) economies rely on government provided infrastructure. It simply is not free. Let's step up and pay for it.

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They should at least extend the bill to the end of the fiscal year so that full apportionments can be released by the DOT

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Jayjay 32 minutes ago

Clowns!!

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