

# Congress averts shutdown of highway funding for 3 months

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Congress on Thursday pushed through a 90-day stopgap measure to extend current highway funding, averting a halt in road and infrastructure projects because of the inability of lawmakers to agree on a broader transportation measure.

Quick approval by the Senate on a voice vote Thursday afternoon came after a House vote of 266-158 and meant that work could continue on scores of highway, transit and bridge projects paid for out of the highway trust fund. The measure would be the ninth extension since a \$286 billion, multiyear funding plan ended in 2009. Had Congress taken no action, the current extension would have expired over the weekend.

The impasses over a longer-term measure stems both from partisan differences over how to best address a highway trust fund that has dwindled because of the increase in fuel-efficient cars and divisions among House Republicans over legislation that has in the past cleared Congress with bipartisan support.

This month, the Senate easily passed a bipartisan bill that would have funded the program for two years at a cost of \$109 billion.

The House transportation committee passed its own version this year, a five-year, \$260 billion measure that would be paid for in part with revenues from new drilling projects, including a proposal to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

But Republicans never brought the measure to the House floor, because some party members thought the price tag was too high, others were unhappy with the removal of dedicated funds for public transportation, and still others didn't like the drilling component.

## Texas impact

For Texas, Thursday's extension of federal transportation funding means that the Texas Department of Transportation will be able to authorize about \$750 million in additional highway spending over the next three years or so because current spending levels would continue. The department had held off earlier based on the chance that a newly authorized transportation bill might have lower spending levels.

The extension likewise is good news for transit advocates, given their concerns about the House version of the reauthorization bill. It would remove a current provision that gives transit 15 percent of gas tax revenue, instead throwing that spending into the general budget and exposing it to cuts or elimination.

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