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Posted at 10:00 AM ET, 03/08/2012 Senate reaches deal on highway bill

By Ed O'Keefe



Senate Majority Leader Sen. Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.) and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) struck a deal on the highway bill Wednesday night. (Alex Wong - GETTY IMAGES)

After failing to advance the measure earlier this week, the Senate plans to move ahead Thursday afternoon with a massive transportation bill set to provide federal funding for the nation's roads and rails for the next two years.

The roughly \$109 billion deal could help create or save more than 2 million jobs in the next two years, according to the bill's backers, who include Democrats, Republicans, labor unions and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Current funding for surface transportation programs will expire on March 31, and both houses of Congress have struggled to advance legislation

Late Wednesday, Senate leaders agreed to hold 30 votes on a series of related and unrelated amendments, including measures to cut taxes, authorize offshore continental oil drilling and two proposals related to the Keystone XL Pipeline. Votes are likely to continue into early next week, Senate aides said.

On the Keystone issue, senators will vote on two amendments: A GOP proposal to approve the \$7 billion project to bring Canadian oil to Texas refineries and a Democratic plan to ban exports of oil pumped through the pipeline.

Democrats anticipate a close vote and Politico reported Thursday that President Obama has lobbied Senate Democrats to reject the Republican amendment.

"It's really almost unbelievable" that Obama would do that, Senate

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[Minority Mitch McConnell \(R-Ky.\)](#) said Thursday on the Senate floor in response to the reports.

Both amendments would require 60 votes to move ahead. Even if the Senate approves the GOP amendment, it would still require Obama's signature.

Bemoaning a months-long fight over final passage of the bill, [Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid \(D-Nev.\)](#) said Thursday morning that the transportation bill is urgently needed to help repair 70,000 subpar bridges and other related funding. The nation's aging transportation infrastructure "is a terrible drag on the economy," he said.

Ahead of the vote, a construction workers union [began a radio advertising campaign targeting GOP leadership](#) of both chambers in their home states.

The advertising plays off the theme of "London Bridge Is Falling Down" and the union said it is running the ad in Ohio and Kentucky, homes to [House Speaker John A. Boehner \(R-Ohio\)](#) and McConnell.

As the Senate begins consideration of its transportation bill, the House's plans remain unclear. Boehner said Monday that a House vote on the Senate bill "is an option."

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