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### Fix our roads to help the economy

By: [Rep. Bill Shuster](#)  
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Transportation is critical to our nation's competitiveness. To put it simply, our transportation network is the backbone of the economy, and we must have a strong foundation to support economic growth. Yet today, we are at a crossroads, and the direction Congress pushes our transportation programs will have a lasting impact on our economy and mobility.

We face stark choices regarding the role of government in our nation's transportation and infrastructure programs. Because of cumbersome federal regulations, red tape and bureaucratic malaise, it can take up to 15 years on average to take a major construction project from inception to completion.

Everyone agrees this timeline is in major need of reform. Moreover, states lack the flexibility necessary to determine their greatest transportation needs and priorities, and there are far too many mandates from Washington.

Our ports are unprepared to accommodate growing international trade and larger container ships. And President Barack Obama continues to block the popular Keystone XL pipeline project that's an important component to an "all-of-the-above" energy strategy that would also create thousands of jobs and help to reduce gas prices at the pump.

At this critical juncture, keeping the status quo isn't good enough. We have waited far too long to address these issues. The time for reform is now. That's why I'm committed to working with Rep. John Mica, chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and my colleagues to produce a strong bill in conference that streamlines bureaucracy, implements key reforms, provides certainty and reliability to states and employers, is responsibly paid for and moves the Keystone XL pipeline project forward.

Key infrastructure reforms are vital to ensure that taxpayer dollars are focused on infrastructure and spent more effectively and efficiently. House Speaker John Boehner is absolutely right when he says transportation reforms are "about breaking down government so we can build up private-sector jobs."

Reforms passed by the House on a bipartisan basis, such as guaranteeing that the money in the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund actually goes to critically needed harbor maintenance, ensuring the continued beneficial use of coal ash and continuing our commitment to repairing the Gulf Coast, are crucial.

Everyone knows that when it comes to construction, time is money. By streamlining the transportation project approval process, we can cut in half the time it takes to get a project approved. It's critical that we give more project approval authority to the states, establish hard deadlines for federal agencies to make decisions and cut the federal red tape involved in getting projects built.

Spending taxpayer dollars wisely is also a critical priority for House Republicans. We need to move forward with a plan that's responsibly paid for and that finally provides reliability and certainty to states to undertake much needed infrastructure projects and improvements and that gets employers off the sidelines and back to investing in their businesses and hiring workers. But we must be honest with the American people and pay for these investments appropriately.

Implementing programmatic reforms is a key element to ensuring that our limited resources are spent more effectively. To better leverage available resources, we can encourage states to partner with the private sector to finance and build projects and increase the availability of low-interest loans for major transportation projects. While the private sector cannot alone address all of our transportation needs, it is important to encourage partnerships that bring all available resources to the table.

Finally, the Keystone XL pipeline would create some 20,000 jobs immediately and as many as 100,000 indirect jobs. Keystone is an important component of the Republican "all-of-the-above" energy strategy. It's time for the Senate and the president to get government out of the way and to get serious about expanding American energy production, creating jobs and addressing high energy prices.

A bipartisan, veto-proof House majority has voted to require approval of the popular pipeline, and despite the president's personal efforts to block it, the project continues to gain momentum, leaving him increasingly isolated.

Still, there's an important role for the federal government to play in our nation's transportation system. I frequently remind my colleagues that the great social philosopher Adam Smith argued the three essential duties of government are to provide security and justice, and to erect and maintain public works to facilitate commerce.

Our Founding Fathers understood the importance of connecting our country through effective trade and communication with transportation and infrastructure. The Articles of Confederation failed in large part because there was no way for Congress to regulate commerce between the states. The founders remedied this by clearly tasking Congress with fulfilling this obligation in the Constitution.

I would be remiss if I did not point out that it's been a Republican tradition to take this obligation seriously — from Abraham Lincoln's support for the transcontinental railroad to Teddy Roosevelt's construction of the Panama Canal to Dwight Eisenhower's establishment of the Interstate Highway System.

We must take this opportunity to fulfill our constitutional obligation to set a new course for America and put our nation's infrastructure programs on the road to reform and our economy back on track. Making government less burdensome with a more appropriate federal role is the right place to start.

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