



## Sen. Reid 'cautiously optimistic' about highway bill talks

By Keith Laing - 05/22/12 04:05 PM ET

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) said Tuesday that he was "cautiously optimistic" about congressional negotiations over a new federal surface transportation bill.

Speaking to reporters, Reid said that the chairwoman of the 47-member conference committee that is working to reach a deal on highway and transit spending, Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), told him Tuesday that 80 percent of the issues between the House and Senate on the measure had been resolved.

"She feels confident that significant progress is being made on this bill," Reid said Tuesday of Boxer, who is chairwoman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and shepherded a two-year, \$109 billion transportation bill through the upper chamber.

"We always know the last 20 percent is the hardest, but we passed a bipartisan bill that will keep about 2.8 million people either working or create jobs to that amount," Reid said of the Boxer-led transportation talks. "So I am again cautiously optimistic that we can get this done."

Reid said he was confident Boxer and counterpart in the House, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman John Mica (R-Fla.), could finish the highway bill negotiations with either or House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio), as is customary on hard-to-handle issues in bicameral negotiations.

"I think Boxer can handle it herself," Reid said, though he added "I'll be happy to meet with anybody to get it done."

Reid said the holds on a compromise emerging from the conference committee was not necessary the "pay-for," or the way lawmakers will fund the transportation measure.

Prior to passing a pair of short-term extensions of the current law that authorizes funding for transportation, the House had proposed a five-year, \$260 billion version. In addition to the longer length of time and higher amount, the House measure proposed paying for additional transportation spending beyond the roughly \$35 billion that is brought in by the federal tax on gasoline by increasing domestic oil drilling.

The Senate-passed version of the measure uses a packages of tax loopholes lawmakers say can be closed to make up the approximately \$13 billion difference.

Despite the vastly different approaches of the chapters, Reid said Tuesday "the pay-for on this bill isn't that difficult.

"I don't think that's going to hold things up," Reid said.

Reid did not mention one of the biggest areas of disagreement between his chamber and the Republican-led House: the inclusion of a provision mandating the approval of the Keystone XL oil pipeline.

However, there have been indications the provision [\*\*might not survive the negotiations.\*\*](#)

Source:

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