



Foxx: Congress failed on highway funds



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Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx is reminding voters that this Congress failed to pass a long-term highway funding bill in the final days leading up to the hotly contested midterms.

“A lot of focus is on the election. That trumps everything for the next couple of days,” Foxx said in an interview with The Hill after a speech in his native North Carolina on Wednesday.

“But I do sense, whether it’s local Chambers of Commerce or [Metropolitan Planning Organizations], that there’s a growing recognition that the accumulation of short-term measures are doing damage to our system.”

Foxx was speaking Tuesday at the SmartRail USA Congress and Expo in Charlotte, and is scheduled to appear at the National Defense Transportation Association-USTRANSCOM fall meeting in St. Louis Wednesday.

The Transportation secretary said that, despite the end-of-campaign clutter, he believes his message about the state of roads in the U.S. could break through.

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“There’s a lot of vision in America when it comes to transportation at the local and state level,” Foxx said. “Every place I go, there is a project a community can point to that will have benefits, such as job creation, better access or helping to accommodate the population surge that’s coming in the next 30 years.”

Foxx said Congress needs to find a way to boost transportation funding for longer than a couple of months to make those projects a reality.

“The problem in just about every in case is they don’t know what Washington is going to do,” he said. “They don’t know what’s next after May 30th, which is the expiration of the latest patch and also the beginning of construction season.”

Foxx and other transportation advocates pushed Congress hard to approve a multi-year transportation bill, but lawmakers struggled to find a way to close an approximately \$15 billion gap in annual road and transit funding that has developed over the years.

The normal source for transportation projects is revenue that is collected by the 18.4-cents-per-gallon federal gas tax. The tax has not been increased since 1993, however, and it is struggling to keep pace with infrastructure expenses as cars become more fuel efficient.

The last transportation bill that was approved by Congress, in 2012, included approximately \$50 billion per year in road and transit spending, but the gas tax is only bringing in about \$34 billion per year.

The Obama administration sent Congress a four-year, \$302 billion proposal with revenue that would be generated from closing corporate tax loopholes. Congress was only able to come up with enough money, approximately \$11 billion, to cover the transportation shortfall until next May, however.

Foxx said Wednesday that he was confident lawmakers would be forced to revisit the transportation funding issue when they return to Washington after next week's elections.

"Using duct tape and bubble gum, Congress has patched the [transportation] system together in a way that they may be out of options for doing that now," he said.

Foxx said the results of the election could spur action on transportation, with polls showing voters are unhappy with the gridlock that has dominated Washington in recent years.

"I think what's happening in the country is people are tired of dysfunction," he said.

"The American people want to see something get done, and we're in an environment in transportation where Democrats and Republicans are starting to come together," Foxx continued, citing recent comments from House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) and House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) about a highway bill being on the GOP's 2015 agenda.

Foxx said early passage of a highway bill in the next Congress could allow lawmakers to show "the American people and the world that we can govern again.

"If focused on, transportation could be a vehicle for getting back to regular order," he said.

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