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Bipartisan compromise underway to fund roads

DAVID SHEPARDSON DETROIT NEWS WASHINGTON BUREAU 2 COMMENTS



Upton)

Washington— Members of Congress are working on a bipartisan compromise bill to fund highway projects through the end of the year as the Obama administration warned they will start cutting payments to states next month.

Americans are driving more fuel efficient cars, driving less because of stubbornly high fuel prices and as a result, the federal 18.4 cent tax on gasoline — which hasn't been hiked in nearly two decades — aren't bringing in enough [revenue](#) to fix the nation's crumbling roads. A separate 24.4 cent tax on diesel fuel also funds road repairs.

The Senate Finance Committee plans to consider a highway funding bill on Thursday —likely on an \$8 billion bill to fund road repairs through the end of the year — while a top [House](#) Republican said talks were underway to reach a compromise.

Rep. Fred Upton, R-St. Joseph, chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, told WJR in Detroit that Republicans are looking for other ways to pay for repairs — after Republicans previously suggested paying for road repairs by reducing mail service from six to five days a week. He said

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a bipartisan bill should be introduced within a week.

"It's got to get done before we get to August," Upton said, saying the shortfall could be \$12 billion. "We're at the bottom of the cookie jar and so that cookie jar has to get refilled."

Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., told reporters Monday that he is also optimistic a deal can be reached as talks between Rep. Dave Camp, R-Midland, and Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., continue.

The Center for American Progress notes that nationwide there are 117,000 active highway and public transportation projects and 700,000 workers [rely on](#) funding from the Highway Trust Fund. Since 2008, Congress has added \$54 billion in general tax revenues to fix roads and highways. The fund is now running about \$15 billion short per year on funds over what it raises in gas tax revenue.

Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx said last week that starting in August, the department will pay states every two weeks as money from gas taxes comes in for road repairs — rather than reimbursing them for bills — unless Congress passes additional funding. It would result in an average 28 percent cut per state.

Through the first four months of the year, overall vehicle travel is flat after rising by just 0.6 percent in 2013 and 0.3 percent in 2012. Travel peaked in 2007 at 3.03 trillion miles —and fell in 2011 to the lowest level since 2003. Total miles traveled in 2013 was 2.97 trillion — 59 billion fewer than the record set in 2007.

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