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Transportation budget goes large, but will it pass?

By [David Tanner](#), Land Line associate editor

Highways, bridges and transit would get billions in extra funding under the budget proposal announced Tuesday by the Obama administration. Federal agencies that regulate trucking would get significantly more money for their safety programs if Congress were to act on the budget as is.

The announcement on Tuesday, March 4, calls for \$47.3 billion for federally funded highways in 2015, an increase of 18.5 percent over the \$40 billion that Congress agreed to spend in 2014.

The U.S. Department of Transportation says it would take more like \$65.3 billion per year to maintain roads and bridges at current standards – and significantly more than that to add capacity, according to a congressionally mandated DOT report.

Highways and bridges are a large part, but not the only part, of the transportation budget request.

The proposal calls for launching a rail-service improvement program that would help expand the Federal Railroad Administration by 200 percent even with a \$1.5 billion cut to Amtrak.

The agency that regulates trucking, the Federal Motor Carrier Administration, would grow 14.3 percent under the president's budget request. Motor carrier safety grants under the FMCSA would grow \$688 million, or 12.7 percent, next year if the budget is approved.

"President Obama has offered the kind of aggressive transportation budget our country needs – one that replenishes the Highway Trust Fund today while also helping ensure the country has a safe, efficient transportation system for tomorrow," U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx stated.

"These funds will do everything from helping communities tackle their transportation to-do lists to improving access to ladders of opportunity. And we will do everything at the Department of Transportation to make this budget a reality, including sending a bill to Congress to support it."

New funding that would be added to existing fuel taxes and other transportation user fees would come from "business tax reforms" according to the DOT.

Getting Congress to approve spending increases could be a tall order even in a traditionally bipartisan area such as transportation and infrastructure.

Highway bill looms

Congress is currently dealing with another large task related to transportation: drafting and approving a long-term reauthorization bill for highways, bridges, transit and infrastructure. This would go well beyond a short-term approach according to Capitol Hill sources.

President Obama has already offered up a four-year, \$302 billion reauthorization proposal, but House and Senate leaders are eyeing a five- or six-year bill and are looking for ways to fund it.

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