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Capitol Report

County officials press Congress to renew transportation funding

June 11, 2014, 5:12 PM ET

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Roy Brooks, chairman of the Large Urban County Caucus and Tarrant County, Texas commissioner, calls on Congress to increase federal transportation funding at a briefing attended by county leaders from around the country at the National Press Club Wednesday.

County officials are asking Congress to drive up federal transportation dollars sent to state and local governments as two major sources of funding near a potential end.

According to the National Association of Counties, 45% of all public roads and 39% of bridges in America are built and maintained by counties. In contrast, the federal government owns about 3% of all roads.

"Counties matter in terms of this nation's infrastructure," said Roy Brooks, chairman of the organization's Large Urban County Caucus and commissioner in Tarrant County, Texas. Brooks spoke with several other county leaders at a transportation briefing at the National Press Club on Wednesday.

James Healy, transportation chairman of the National Association of Counties, said that no county in America has the financial resources to replace the federal share of the transportation infrastructure cost.

"We just don't have those dollars," Healy said. "We cannot do this alone."

One in nine of the nation's bridges are deemed structurally inefficient, according to the American Society of Civil Engineers, which issues a yearly report card for the state of

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America's infrastructure.

"County bridges are more likely to be structurally deficient than federal, state or municipal bridges," Brooks said, with 16% of all county-owned bridges found structurally deficient in 2012 – a higher rate than the national average.

The local leaders are pushing for an increase in the federal gas tax, which goes to the Highway Trust Fund. [The fund is nearing insolvency](#) because of a rise in fuel-efficient automobiles and a drop in gas tax revenues caused by lower consumer spending in the economic downturn.

They also want Congress to reauthorize the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Act, or MAP-21, for six years.

MAP-21 was signed into law in July 2012 and paved the way for \$105 billion in federal surface transportation funding over the course of two years. If it isn't reauthorized, it will expire on October 1.

So far, Congress hasn't supported a gas tax hike and MAP-21 is stalled.

Earlier this year, [President Barack Obama](#) pitched another plan to fix the nation's crumbling infrastructure with a \$302 billion investment over four years. The Grow America Act, however, has hit speed bumps on [Capitol Hill](#).

If Congress doesn't act, Brooks said, counties will have to delay or cancel major transportation projects, including repairing bridges and reducing congestion on roads.

"Congressional inaction is a threat to America's urban communities," Brooks said. "It's going to keep our citizens at a standstill, literally, in traffic."

– Homa Bash of Medill News Service

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