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May 7, 2014

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## Surface Transportation Increase Unlikely -- Despite Infrastructure Needs, Public Transit Wants

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By **Nathan Hurst**  
Roll Call Staff  
May 5, 2014, 5:51 p.m.

Senators writing a six-year surface transportation bill are planning to keep status quo spending levels and skip an administration proposal to boost public transit programs and update the nation's aging infrastructure.

That means lawmakers could miss another chance to prepare the nation's transit infrastructure to deal with a surge in urbanization in the coming decades. Most of the expected U.S. population growth of 100 million new residents by 2050 will take place in urban areas, making modernization of aging transit systems and construction of new ones more urgent for many lawmakers.

The new authorization measure is expected to be unveiled this week. It's likely to extend current spending levels for roads, bridges and transit, with some increases to account for inflation. But given that it's an election year, negotiations are unlikely to produce a long-term fix for the ailing Highway Trust Fund.

And for lawmakers in more rural districts, which depend more on automotive transportation, it's hard to win support for huge new transit expenses in densely populated urban areas.

The White House had hoped to move its own four-year, \$302 billion surface transportation proposal that was sent to Congress as draft legislation last week.

Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx defended the 62 percent increase the administration wants for transit spending — up to \$13.6 billion in fiscal 2015 from \$8.6 billion this year — as a necessary shift as Americans increasingly move to urban areas and drive less.

"Many of these communities are trying to get ahead of these population surges by creating transportation options for the future," he told Senate appropriators.

But the proposal won't advance amid partisan tensions and election-year jockeying.

### Money for Transit

**Congress first set up guaranteed formula funding for transit systems as part of a deal brokered in the early 1980s with President Ronald Reagan. It set aside 20 percent of revenues from the Highway Trust Fund for transit, on the premise that**



Mark Wilson/Getty Images File Photo

Foxx defended the 62 percent increase the Obama administration wants for transit spending. It is unlikely to be taken up by Congress due to partisan tensions and election-year jockeying.

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boosting transit options for commuters would help reduce congestion on the interstate and national highway systems, producing a direct benefit for fuel tax payers who generate the bulk of the trust fund's revenue.

The American Public Transportation Association, which represents transit agencies from around the country, contends that the Obama administration's overtures on boosting transit spending will go a long way toward building out transit systems that have, in many cities, experienced a crush of riders as fuel prices remain elevated, and younger workers choose to commute less in their cars.

In 2013, American transit systems accounted for 10.7 billion trips, the highest numbers in 57 years, said Michael Melaniphy, the transit group's president and chief executive officer.

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