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Obama preparing transportation plan

Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx on Tuesday announced that President Obama plans to provide lawmakers with a legislative proposal for renewing federal transportation spending.

The president was criticized for failing to provide a specific bill proposal during the last infrastructure funding debate in 2012, when lawmakers approved the 2012 Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) Act.

Foxx said Tuesday in a **blog post** on the Department of Transportation's website that the Obama administration will soon issue a draft of a proposed MAP-21 reauthorization bill, reversing the president's 2012 decision to defer the details on funding levels to Congress.

"Soon, the Obama administration will do exactly what the President promised in St. Paul, Minnesota, earlier this year: Present Congress with a surface transportation reauthorization proposal," Foxx wrote.

During most of the 2012 infrastructure funding debate, the Obama administration shied away from recommending specific legislative language after the president's proposal for a six-year, \$556 billion that year fell flat with lawmakers.

Then-Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said often that the president was deferring to appropriators in Congress to craft a detailed transportation funding bill. Republicans in the House sharply criticized Obama for not recommending a specific way to pay for his transportation funding proposals, such as increasing the 18.4 cents-per-gallon federal gas tax that has been stagnant since 1993.

The gas tax has traditionally been used to fill the coffers of the transportation department's Highway Trust Fund, which is used to pay for federal road and transit projects. The fuel levy has not been increased since 1993, and it was not indexed to inflation when it was last hiked more than 20 years ago, however.

Lawmakers said in 2012 that they were only able to find enough money to approve a two-year transportation funding bill, which is why the current infrastructure bill is set to expire in September.

Obama has already signaled that he thinks lawmakers should use \$150 billion in anticipated savings from corporate tax reform to close the Highway Trust Fund shortfall, which is projected to reach \$20 billion annually without congressional action. But an agreement on tax reform is unlikely, leaving lawmakers to find another funding source.

Foxx said Tuesday that his recent completed **bus trip** to tour infrastructure projects around the U.S. gave him the motivation to "work harder" at convincing lawmakers to pass a new round of road and transit funding.

"It sure feels good to be home again after last week's 'Invest In America, Commit to the Future' bus tour," Foxx wrote. "But what we saw on our trip — and what we've heard from people around the country and state DOTs — has only motivated us to work harder to help bring this nation the transportation certainty Americans need."

Foxx's week-long tour took him to eight states as he pressed lawmakers to turn Obama's proposal for a four-year, \$302 billion surface transportation bill into law this year.

The DOT chief said he saw the potential consequences of congressional inaction after he visited incomplete infrastructure projects like a proposed streetcar in Atlanta and the extension of Interstate 49 in Louisiana.

"I saw last week what happens when funding dries up," he wrote. "I saw it in Garland, Texas, where the LBJ Freeway is still waiting. I saw it in Louisville, Kentucky, where UPS CEO Scott Davis explained how better surface transportation will help the carrier compete better."

Lawmakers in both parties and chambers have said they want to avoid an interruption in transportation funding later this year, but neither party has proposed a specific legislative proposal to renew the appropriations yet.

The Congressional Budget Office has projected that the Highway Trust Fund will run out of money as early as August without congressional action.

Foxx said Tuesday that he was inspired by his bus trip to keep pressing the case with lawmakers as the fall deadline looms closer.

"The job of getting a multi-year transportation bill -- one that funds the safe and dependable infrastructure our economic growth requires -- continues, and we can't afford to rest until we've reached the finish line," the DOT chief wrote.

TAGS: Barack Obama, Anthony Foxx, Highway Trust Fund shortfall, MAP-21 Reauthorization, Gas Tax

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