



## Boxer promises highway bill next week



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The chairwoman of the Senate committee that is considering a reauthorization of federal transportation funding programs said Tuesday that her draft of the bill would be ready to be marked up by next week.

Testifying before the Senate Finance Committee, Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) said her Environment and Public Works panel is readying its surface transportation bill for a mark up as lawmakers are rushing to beat a Sept. 30 deadline for renewing U.S. infrastructure investment programs.

"Our bill will be current funding, plus inflation," Boxer said of the highly anticipated legislation, which is intended to reauthorize the expiring Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Act (MAP-21).

Boxer's announcement came as the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) **warned** lawmakers that it would require approximately \$18 billion per year to pay for a new transportation bill. The budget office told lawmakers they had the option of finding the money in other areas of the federal budget or approving a 15 cents-per-gallon increase over the current 18.4 cents per gallon federal gas tax.

The money is intended to replenish the Department of Transportation's Highway Trust Fund, which is projected to go bankrupt as early as August without congressional action.

Boxer said Tuesday that her committee's bill would be "fiscally sound — current funding plus inflation and using every dollar wisely."

Boxer said it was important that lawmakers come up with a way to pay for a long-term transportation bill. The expiring measure was passed in 2012, and infrastructure advocates said it did not provide to state and local governments that were relying on federal funding to help pay for transportation projects.

"States, cities, and businesses involved in transportation need the certainty from a long-term bill — a short-term patch is not sufficient," she said.

Boxer said the effects of the potential bankruptcy in the Highway Trust Fund this summer were already starting to be felt.

"Many states have already announced that they are postponing or canceling critical transportation projects due to the fear that federal funds will be delayed or cut off," she said. "This will have a domino effect that will be felt throughout the economy."

President Obama has proposed that lawmakers use approximately \$150 billion from a corporate tax reform package that is considered unlikely to be approved this year to boost the Highway Trust Fund's coffers. Obama included the proposal in a draft of a four-year, **\$302 billion transportation bill** that he sent to Capitol Hill last week.

Republicans on the committee Boxer was addressing Tuesday were lukewarm on the idea of increasing funding for federal transportation projects, unless it could be paid for.

The top ranking Republican member of the panel, Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), said he was opposed to one idea that has been floating to pay for transportation projects: repatriation, which involves increasing taxes on overseas capital to generate extra revenue.

Hatch said Tuesday that the idea of using repatriation funds to replenish the Highway Trust Fund is "not a very good one."

Boxer told members of the Finance Committee that she needed them to find at least enough money to keep the Highway Trust Fund solvent for the next year.

"We need you to figure out how to pump \$18 billion into the Highway Trust Fund," she said.

Boxer said the alternative was a potential shutdown of federal transportation programs.

"It is critical for our nation to continue investing in our aging infrastructure, and we must work together to find the sweet spot for a dependable, bipartisan source of funding for the Highway Trust Fund," she said. "Much depends on us, and our states are looking to us to act now. Failure is not an option, and our committees must lead the way."

**TAGS: Barbara Boxer, Highway Trust Fund, Gas Tax, MAP-21 Reauthorization**

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