



Murray: 'We just need to find the revenue' for highway bill



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The Senate Democrats' top budget writer said Tuesday that lawmakers "just need to find the revenue" to pay for a new transportation funding bill.

The comments came after the Department of Transportation said again on Tuesday that its current money would **run out of money** in August.

The transportation department updated its Highway Trust Fund ticker on Tuesday to show that the projected bankruptcy date for federal infrastructure funding is around **Aug. 29**.

Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) said the agency's warning confirmed the funding situation for the nation's infrastructure was dire.

"This latest projection confirms that every day Congress doesn't act to shore up the Highway Trust Fund, the risk grows for construction projects, jobs, and economic growth in communities across the country," Murray said in a statement.

Lawmakers have been struggling to find a way to close a shortfall in transportation funding that is estimated to be as high as \$16 billion per year.

The traditional source for transportation funding is revenue that is collected by the federal gas tax, which is currently 18.4 cents per gallon. The tax only brings in about \$34 billion per year, however, and the current level of transportation spending infrastructure advocates want lawmakers to maintain is about \$50 billion annually.

The gas tax has not been increased since 1993, and it was not indexed to inflation during the last hike, however.

Complicated matters further, the current federal transportation funding bill that includes the authorization to collect the gas tax is also scheduled to expire on Sept. 30.

Senate Democrats have proposed a six-year, \$265 billion replacement for the expiring transportation bill, but they have left it up to Murray and other budget writers in the upper chamber to find a way to pay for the measure beyond the gas tax revenue.

Murray said Tuesday that lawmakers have already agreed that it would be bad to let the transportation funding run out completely.

All that's left is for them come up with a way to pay for the fix, she added.

"There is already bipartisan agreement that we should not cut our investments in roads, bridges, and other important infrastructure projects. We just need to find the revenue to pay for it," Murray said. "Republicans and Democrats should be able to agree to close just a few wasteful corporate tax loopholes to replenish the Highway Trust Fund so we can avoid a completely unnecessary construction shutdown this summer."

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has projected that lawmakers will have to find an extra **\$100 billion** in addition to the gas tax revenue to pay for a new six-year transportation bill.

Transportation advocates have pushed Congress to increase the gas tax for the first time in two decades to close the gap, but most lawmakers have been reluctant to raise taxes in the middle of an election year.

President Obama has recommended that lawmakers use approximately \$150 billion from closing corporate tax loopholes to help pay for the new infrastructure spending. Obama has proposed a four-year, **\$302 billion** transportation bill that he says would increase the annual road and transit funding by about \$25 billion per year.

The corporate tax reform proposal is considered unlikely to be approved and lawmakers in both chambers have begun exploring other funding options, however.

House Republicans have released a controversial proposal to use tie transportation funding to **cut backs** at the U.S. Postal Service. House GOP leaders has said that eliminating Saturday letter deliveries would provide approximately \$15 billion that could be used for at least one year of new transportation funding.

The GOP proposal has run into hot water with transportation and postal advocates, who have both argued that the funding issues should remain separate, however.

TAGS: Patty Murray, Department of Transportation, Highway Trust Fund, United States Postal Service, MAP-21 Reauthorization, Gas Tax

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