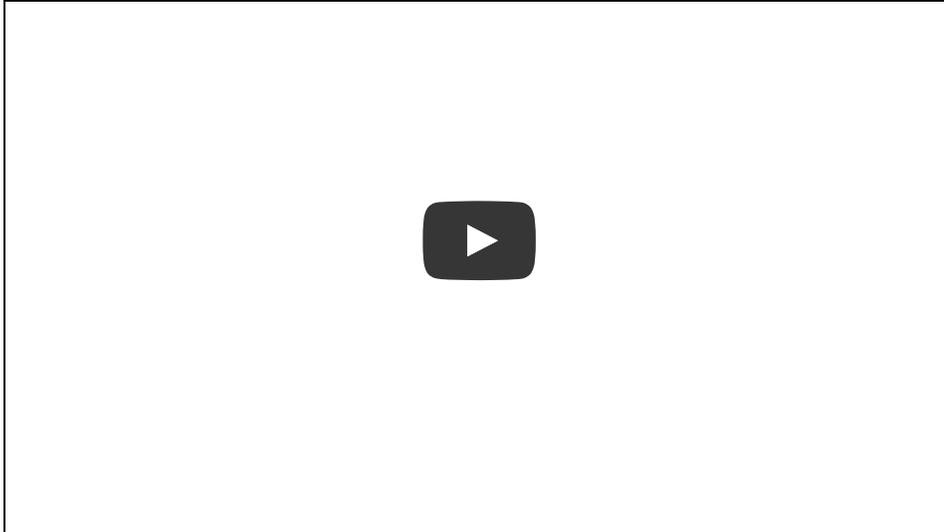




Biden uses white board to push for highway funding

By Keith Laing - 07/23/14 05:01 PM EDT



Vice President Joe Biden used the White House's "white board" to push for a long-term extension of federal transportation funding on Wednesday.

Congress is considering a **\$10.9 billion** temporary extension of road and transit funding that would run out next month otherwise. The measure would carry transportation funding to May 2015.

Biden said in a **video** that was posted on the White House website that he was glad lawmakers were likely going to prevent a transportation funding bankruptcy, but he argued for a longer solution.

"The White House has been doing these white boards for years and it's my turn to take the pen and talk about something I feel passionately about and I believe is one of the keys to rebuilding America," he said.

"America's been built on the back of the most modern infrastructure in the world all the way back to the beginning," Biden continued. "The first national road was built in the early 1800s. The Congress passed that and it generated a lot of money, not from the federal taxpayers, but investments from the local communities."

Biden continued offering a history of transportation development in the U.S., citing the construction of the Erie Canal and TransContinental Railroad in the 1800's and the Interstate Highway System in the 1950's.

Biden said the highway system, which is the funding that is in jeopardy now, was initiated by a Republican president and was the "biggest public works pin history.

"It not only generate an immense amount of commerce and wealth, it's the reason for suburbs. it's the reason why we have changed so radically," he said. "That was an infrastructure project that started that."

The vice president offered a starkly different perspective of the transportation funding debates in Congress today. He said lawmakers needed to think about the impact of underinvestment in infrastructure before they settle for temporary stopgap measures.

"Businesses go where they can increase productivity," Biden said. "Productivity relates with how rapidly they can get things to market, how cheaply they can get to market, and how often they can get to market. That's infrastructure."

Biden said he hoped lawmakers would approve the temporary transportation funding bill, but then give serious consideration to the Obama's administration's four-year, \$302 billion proposal.

"I know the Congress is in the process of coming up with a stopgap measure and how they're able to get it down," he said. "But in the meantime, we think we need a fulsome solution, at least it relates to highways and highway infrastructure."

The temporary transportation funding measure is intended to prevent a **bankruptcy** in the Department of Transportation's Highway Trust Fund that budget analysts have warned would happen next month without congressional action.

The Obama administration has pushed lawmakers to use approximately **\$150 billion** that it says can be saved from closing corporate tax loopholes to pay for a new long-term transportation funding package.

Lawmakers have largely ignored the proposal, focusing instead on a temporary extension paid for with money from other areas of the federal budget like pension changes and custom fee increases.

The normal source for funding transportation projects has been the 18.4 cents-per-gallon federal gas tax. The tax has not been increased since 1993, however, and it has struggled to keep pace with infrastructure expenses as cars have become more fuel efficient.

The current transportation bill, which is expiring in September, includes about \$50 billion per year in infrastructure spending. But the gas tax only brings \$34 billion per year at its current rate.

Transportation advocates have pushed lawmakers to **increase** the gas tax for the first time in two decades to help close the \$16 billion shortfall.

However, lawmakers and the Obama administration have both reluctant to ask drivers to pay more for road construction in the middle of an election year.

Conservative groups in Washington have pushed Congress to reduce transportation funding to at least the amount of money that is brought in by the gas tax, **if not further**.

But lawmakers have been equally as unwilling to cut back on construction projects in their districts as they have been to raise the gas tax to pay for them.

The Senate is scheduled to vote on the temporary transportation funding bill this week. The measure was **approved** last week in the House by a wide margin.

TAGS: Joe Biden, Highway Trust Fund, Gas Tax, MAP-21 Reauthorization

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