



Former DOT chief: \$10.9B highway bill 'totally inadequate'



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Former Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said Tuesday that the \$10.9 billion highway bill that was approved by lawmakers last week is "totally inadequate," the *Atlanta Business Chronicle* reports.

LaHood was speaking Tuesday about the need for a long-term transportation funding package that would also include an increase in the 18.4 cents-per-gallon federal gas tax at the Georgia state capitol.

LaHood said he would have liked to have seen Congress implement a 10-cent increase in the gas tax, which is the traditional source for transportation projects and has not been raised in two decades, according to the report.

"If that had been done in 1993, the last time the gas tax was raised, we probably wouldn't be having this debate," LaHood said.

The gas tax has been the traditional source for transportation projects since the inception of the Interstate Highway System in the 1950's. However, the tax has struggled to keep pace with infrastructure expenses as cars have become more fuel efficient.

Transportation advocates pushed in the recently completed infrastructure funding debate for a gradual increase in the gas tax to pay for multi-year highway and transit bill.

However, lawmakers were reluctant to increase the amount that paid by drivers for road construction during an election year, and they turned instead to a **temporary patch** that will maintain the current level of funding until May 2015.

LaHood said Tuesday that the compressed timeline will not allow state and local governments to properly plan long-term transportation projects.

"That is totally inadequate for any kind of planning or vision," he said.

Lawmakers relied largely on revenue from other areas of the federal budget like so-called pension smoothing and custom fee increases to pay for the transportation funding stopgap.

Critics argued that lawmakers were taking money that was anticipated over a 10-year period to help pay for eight months of transportation spending.

President Obama is expected to sign the temporary transportation funding soon.

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