

# Transportation secretary urges infrastructure spending

Bart Jansen, USA TODAY [\(/staff/2126/bart-jansen\)](#) 11:10 a.m. EST February 20, 2014

*Anthony Foxx said investment in transportation projects is needed to avoid business coming to a halt.*



(Photo: Susan Walsh, AP)

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WASHINGTON – Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx urged about 300 people Thursday at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to press Congress for more spending on transportation projects, to avoid business grinding to a halt.

"We need to invest more funding," Foxx said of aging highways, bridges and rail lines. "Obviously we want to avoid a train wreck."

The current highway policy expires Sept. 30, but Congress has been reluctant for several years to set long-term policy to avoid raising the gas tax, which funds construction. The gas tax of 18.4 cents per gallon hasn't been raised since 1993, which hasn't kept pace with inflation or with vehicles that are traveling further with the same amount of fuel.

The Congressional Budget Office has projected that without an infusion of funding, the Highway Trust Fund will be unable to embark on new highway projects in 2015.

"The Highway Trust Fund is on track to bounce checks before fiscal year 2015 begins, as soon perhaps as this August," Foxx said.

Foxx said an estimated \$70 billion a year in additional funding is needed just to repair highways.

"Every year we wait is compounding the investment that our children and grandchildren will need to make," Foxx said. "The fiscally responsible path is to invest now and not later."

Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., and head of the panel that oversees highways, said the Environment and Public Works Committee will vote in April on legislation to extend policy for five or six years. Rep. Bill Shuster, R-Pa., who is head of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, plans to vote by August on his version of legislation.

But funding remains the key sticking point. In an effort to spur Congress, Tom Donohue, the Chamber's CEO, and Richard Trumka, president of the AFL-CIO, agree on the need to raise the gas tax as the most efficient way to provide more highway funding.

President Obama proposed in his State of the Union speech to spend part of the proceeds of a pending overhaul of corporate tax policy on transportation projects. But the prospects for the Republican House and Democratic Senate to agree on tax legislation aren't clear.

"We believe it's a smart approach to link corporate tax reform to infrastructure investment," Foxx told reporters after the speech, while acknowledging it's not the only idea on the table. "We're interested in working with folks that want to get something done."

Foxx argued in his speech that the need for construction is urgent. More than 100,000 bridges are old enough to collect Medicare, he said, while the American Society of Civil Engineers estimates businesses will lose \$1 trillion a year in sales unless transportation is improved.

"The United States faces a massive infrastructure deficit, and if this deficit is not addressed, it will stunt the recovery we have begun and cripple our economy," said Foxx, a former mayor of Charlotte.

Meanwhile, the country is projected to grow by 100 million people by 2050 and needs to move 4 million tons more freight by that year, Foxx said.

"Less revenue, more people, more freight, more gridlock — that is not a formula for success," Foxx said.

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