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Obama to Congress: OK new cash for roads, bridges

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By Associated Press

Wednesday, May 14, 2014

TARRYTOWN, N.Y. (AP) - The government is running out of money to repair deteriorating roads, bridges and ports, and President [Barack Obama](#) says more federal spending will help avert a looming crisis that could stifle economic growth and torment commuters.

[Obama](#)'s visit Wednesday afternoon to New York's Tappan Zee Bridge was a central part of his administration's effort this week to call attention to the nation's crumbling infrastructure.

The major Hudson River crossing point, which opened to traffic in 1955, is now being replaced at a cost of \$3.9 billion. The financing is largely by bonds paid for through higher tolls.

In addition to promoting a four-year, \$302 billion transportation plan that he wants [Congress](#) to back, the president intended to cite efforts to cut red tape and delays in permitting, according to the [White House](#).

Stepping off the tarmac at JFK, [Obama](#) and first lady Michelle Obama were greeted by New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who is high on Democrats' list of potential candidates to succeed [Obama](#) in 2016. The three shook hands with supporters before boarding helicopters for the flight to the bridge.

[Obama](#) also was to headline a pair of high-dollar fundraisers benefiting Democratic candidates in the November elections. On Thursday, the president and first lady planned to attend the dedication ceremony for the National September 11 Memorial & Museum at the World Trade Center.

Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx kicked off the public works push Monday, warning that the Highway Trust Fund, which relies on gasoline taxes, could run dry in August. Those taxes haven't gone up in 20 years.

Vice President Joe Biden was in Cleveland Wednesday to push the administration's case for greater spending on roads and bridges. He said the U.S. has fallen behind other countries on transportation, noting that the World Economic Forum ranked the United States 18th in the quality of the nation's roads.

"Folks, we cannot stand still," he said. "If we do, we will lose our economic prominence in the world."

[Obama](#) was expected to announce modest steps to speed up the permitting process for infrastructure projects. The plan would try to improve coordination among agencies so projects aren't slowed by multiple reviews, the [White House](#) said.

The [White House](#) said the permitting process for the Tappan Zee's replacement normally would have taken three years to five years, but was completed in 1½ years because of quicker reviews and other changes.

Republicans contended [Obama](#) was hypocritical for claiming credit for the expedited process while his administration has yet to decide the fate of a proposed Canada-to-Texas oil pipeline. The GOP is using that up-in-the-air project to bash Democrats ahead of the November elections.

"It's a real challenge to listen to the president talk about reforming the permitting system when he's been sitting on the permit for the country's largest shovel-ready infrastructure program, the Keystone XL pipeline, for five years," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.

Half of the administration \$302 billion transportation plan would be in addition to the programs paid for with fuel taxes. That extra spending would come from revenue raised by closing what the administration says are corporate tax loopholes and by making other changes in business taxes, a long shot in a politically divided Congress(/topics/congress/).

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