

Transport advocates want more money than Senate provides

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By [Keith Laing](#) - 05/13/14 04:35 PM EDT

Road and transit advocates are lamenting the lack of an increase in funding in the \$265 billion surface transportation that has been unveiled by the Senate.

Senate leaders said their **bill** would replace an existing transportation funding measure and maintain current funding levels, adjusted for inflation, for the next six years.

The Senate bill includes about \$44 billion per year on road and transit projects, which is based on a Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projection of how much revenue will be needed to maintain the federal government's current transportation programs.

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Transportation for America Director James Corless said Tuesday that he was appreciative of the Senate's effort to prevent a projected bankruptcy in transportation funding that has been forecasted to occur as early as August.

But Corless said an annual funding increase is needed to improve the condition of U.S. roads and transit systems beyond their current states.

"The draft bill takes several important steps to address gaps or to build on some policies introduced in MAP-21," Corless said in a statement. "However, our alliance of local elected, business and civic leaders believes the proposed legislation stops well short of providing communities the access to resources they need to support economic success."

The current transportation funding bill, known as the 2012 Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Act, is scheduled to expire in September.

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has additionally projected that the Department of Transportation's Highway Trust Fund will run out of money at the end of this summer without congressional action.

Corless said the Senate bill would prevent the bankruptcy, but he said it would also maintain the status quo in federal transportation funding.

"Rather than make improvements on the margins, the federal program needs to recognize the importance of our cities, towns and suburbs and move control and accountability closer to the people who pay into the system," Corless said. "Allowing communities to compete for a larger share of the funding would incentivize innovation and reward smart decision-making and efficiency."

Lawmakers on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee who helped to draft the transportation bill said when they unveiled the measure that they were trying to provide as much

funding as possible for as long as they could.

"The legislation builds on the success of the comprehensive reforms and performance-based approach to transportation investment in Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century," the committee said in a press release announcing the filing of the transportation legislation. "It provides long-term funding, giving state and local governments the certainty and stability they need to improve and develop our nation's transportation infrastructure. These investments will create new jobs, provide a boost to our nation's economy, and keep us competitive in the global marketplace."

The last transportation bill, which was passed in 2012, included only enough funding for about 18 months worth of transportation projects. Lawmakers said at that time that the \$109 billion measure was all they could muster in the face of a growing transportation funding deficit.

The traditional funding source for congressional transportation bills has been revenue that is collected from the federal gas tax, which is currently priced at 18.4 cents per gallon.

The gas tax has not been increased since 1993, however, and it was not adjusted for inflation when last hiked. As a result, the gas tax only brings in \$34 billion per year.

The 2012 transportation bill included more than \$50 billion in transportation spending, and the CBO has said that lawmakers will need to approve at least about \$45 billion per year going forward to keep pace with road and transit maintenance demands.

President Obama has suggested that lawmakers use approximately \$150 billion from a corporate tax reform package to help pay for the infrastructure projects, but it is unlikely that lawmakers will back using that measure to pay for transportation funding.

Transportation advocates and some Democrats have pushed to increase the gas tax to approximately 33 cents per gallon, arguing that the fuel levy would be near that amount now if it had been indexed to inflation.

Republicans and the Obama administration have both been reluctant to raise taxes at the pump in an election year. President Obama has recommended instead that lawmakers use \$150 billion from a tax reform package that is considered unlikely to become law to help for the transportation spending.

American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) President Randy Over provided a lukewarm assessment of the Senate's transportation bill on Tuesday that was similar to T4A's Corless' take.

"ASCE has been saying for months that we must fix this problem immediately with a long-term, sustainable revenue solution in order to keep America competitive," Over said in a statement. "Regrettably, while the bill may reflect political realities, it does not go far enough in addressing our country's investment gap. By maintaining our current funding levels, we are maintaining America's D+ infrastructure grades. ASCE's Report Card for America's Infrastructure shows that our nation needs a renewed investment strategy for a new century."

Over said he was glad that Senate leaders like Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) and David Vitter (R-La.) were attempting to craft a bipartisan solution to the transportation funding issue.

But he added that "our challenges are too vast and the costs are too great for us to continue with the status-quo."

"We applaud the leadership exhibited by Sens. Boxer and Vitter to start the discussion to solve this problem," Over said. "Now the question becomes: how are we going to pay for it? ASCE supports an

all options on the table approach to addressing the insolvency crisis with the Highway Trust Fund. America's economy cannot afford for the Highway Trust Fund to become insolvent—now is the time for action.”

The House has not yet offered a version of the transportation funding bill.

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