

GOP senators predict highway funding will change



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By [Keith Laing](#) - 08/20/14 05:04 PM EDT

Sens. John Boozman (R-Ark.) and James Inhofe (R-Okla.) predicted this week that lawmakers will find a new way to pay for U.S. transportation projects beyond the gas tax, [according to](#) the Fort Smith, Ark., *Southwest Times Record*.

The federal gas tax, which is currently priced at 18.4 cents per gallon, has been the traditional source of revenue for transportation projects since the inception of the Interstate Highway System in the 1950s.

The tax has struggled to keep pace with infrastructure expenses as cars have become more fuel efficient, however, and lawmakers had to approve a nearly \$11 billion patch for the Department of Transportation's Highway Trust Fund last month.

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Inhofe predicted in a speech at the Western Arkansas Regional Intermodal Transportation Authority that lawmakers would be forced to come up with a new way to pay for road and transit projects in the long term when the stopgap expires next spring.

"Coming up between now and May, you'll see a new funding mechanism that is going to change how we are funding our roads and highways," Inhofe said, according to the report.

"This is not an announcement on my part, because I still maintain opposition to any new tax increases, however it's more of a user fee than a tax increase," he continued.

Boozman, who was appearing alongside Inhofe, agreed, saying that the gas tax system was on its last legs because "people just aren't driving as much as they used to."

"We're going to have to figure out how we can get a revenue stream to support that, and there'll be a lot of controversy about that," Boozman said.

Lawmakers struggled for months to come up with a funding source for the **\$10.8 billion** transportation bill that they passed before they left Washington for their annual August recess.

Transportation advocates pushed hard for an increase in the gas tax, which has not been raised since 1993.

The federal government currently spends about \$50 billion per year on infrastructure projects across the nation. However, the gas tax only brings approximately \$34 billion, forcing lawmakers to tap other areas of the federal budget to make up the difference if they do not want to cut back on construction.

Lawmakers are reluctant to consider increasing the amount that is paid by drivers for road and transit construction in the middle of an election cycle.

They also did not give serious consideration to cutting back on the amount of transportation projects that are funded with federal money, as some conservative groups had suggested.

The result was a months-long standoff that ended with a the eight-month extension, approved in the final days of July.

Inhofe said he was confident lawmakers would be able to reach another agreement on extending the infrastructure funding next spring.

"One thing we all agree on is transportation, because that's what we are supposed to be doing," he said, according to the report.

"This is a nationwide thing that we're going to have to get back on the road," the Oklahoma senator continued.