Leaders of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee announced this week they have agreed in principle on how to proceed with the next federal surface transportation authorization bill, the successor to 2012’s MAP-21. I also have the usual roundup of links on the future of the Highway Trust Fund, state activity on transportation revenues, public-private partnerships and tolling and state multi-modal strategies.

Senators Define Parameters of Authorization Bill

At a news conference Thursday, Senate Environment and Public Works Committee chair Barbara Boxer, ranking member David Vitter, and Transportation Subcommittee leaders Tom Carper and John Barrasso laid out a set of principles to guide the next surface transportation authorization bill. The group is aiming for a six-year bill (rather than a short-term patch) that adjusts current spending levels for inflation, maintains existing formula programs, focuses on policies that expand opportunities for rural areas, better utilizes local resources and requires better information-sharing from federal grantees.

What’s left up to others is figuring out how to pay for it. It’s estimated that a six-year bill would cost on the order of $100 billion and perhaps more to ensure the longevity of the Highway Trust Fund, which is expected to go broke this July. Boxer said Thursday she’d like to address authorization and the trust fund in one bill. But, according to Politico, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Bill Shuster is looking to address the two issues separately.

EPW leaders expressed optimism that Congress can act on a bill before the deadline for trust fund insolvency. But while some saw the broad agreement as a sign of progress, others are skeptical that it can all get done this year.

Sen. John Thune, the ranking Republican on the Senate Commerce Committee, which along with the Finance Committee will play a big role in coming up with a funding solution, told Politico: “it’s hard to see that it gets done this year.” Thune also noted that a general fund transfer would require an offset elsewhere in the budget and such transfers, which Congress has relied on in recent years including to fund much of MAP-21, are “not a sustainable formula for the future.”

But some also found the principles as laid out by EPW committee leaders somewhat lacking.

Tanya Snyder of Streetsblog USA wrote: “What’s missing? Any commitment to organizing the federal transportation program more deliberately around national goals like emissions reduction and safety. Any agreement to strengthen performance measures, which had a baby-step debut with MAP-21. And while we wouldn’t necessarily expect to hear it in a statement of principles like this, reformers would always be keen to hear some reassurance that transit, biking and walking will get a fair shake and that road maintenance will be prioritized over expansion.”
**MAP-21 Reauthorization & the Future of the Highway Trust Fund**

- Senate Budget Committee Chair Patty Murray said this week the threat of a bankruptcy for the trust fund is growing, *The Hill* [5] reported [5]. On the Senate floor Tuesday, she warned her colleagues that “if this isn’t resolved, construction projects to improve our roads and bridges could shut down and leave workers without a paycheck.” Moreover, Murray noted, many states are already being impacted by the federal uncertainty. “In Arkansas, 10 construction projects, like building highway connections and replacing bridges, have already been put on hold,” she said. “In Colorado, the state wants to widen a major highway to ease congestion between Denver and Fort Collins. But officials there say with the funding shortage in the Highway Trust Fund, that project could be delayed.”

- U.S. Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx is headed out on the road next week [6] for an eight-state, five-day trip to make the case for infrastructure investment. Foxx will hit stops in Columbus, Dayton, Cincinnati, Louisville, Nashville, Atlanta, Anniston, Birmingham, Demopolis, Jackson, Madison Parish, Shreveport and Dallas highlighting manufacturers, bridges, freight facilities and highway projects. *On his blog this week the secretary writes* [7] that “We must find the will to address our infrastructure deficit—to repair our aging roads, bridges, and transit systems and plan for the new transportation options we need as our population grows by more than 100 million in the coming decades. It's a simple equation: Not investing today will choke tomorrow's economy. By continuing to stick our heads in the sand, we are failing our children.”

- In a recent post [8], I wrote briefly about the recent American Society of Civil Engineers annual legislative fly-in. There is much more about the event, including the details of the infrastructure investment message ASCE members brought to Capitol Hill last month, in a blog post on the ASCE website... [9]

- Keith Laing of *The Hill* rounds up a familiar list of “Five ways to fix the Highway Trust Fund.” [10] They include increasing the gas tax, indexing the gas tax to inflation, taxing drivers by the mile, taxing wholesale oil transactions, and—what he calls the “most likely scenario”—transferring money from other areas of the federal budget.

- Transit advocates are promising to not be caught flatfooted this time in the authorization process as they were two years when they saw House Republicans propose eliminating the Highway Trust Fund’s transit account, *Roll Call* [11] reported this week [11]. They’ve put together a coalition called *Getting America to Work* [12] to lobby for increased transit funding.


**Legacy of MAP-21**

- The Transportation Research Board has a new report [14] looking at how state departments of transportation and their partners are working to enhance the performance of transportation systems and fulfill the performance measurement requirements in MAP-21.

- **North Carolina:** *The Dispatch* newspaper reported this week [15] on how things are working under the state’s new Strategic Mobility Formula, which takes a data-driven approach to assessing transportation projects.

**State Activity on Transportation Revenues**

- **Illinois:** Gov. Pat Quinn this week unveiled [16] a six-year, $8.6 billion construction program to rebuild roads and bridges and improve public transportation in the state. The program is expected to be funded through $6.99 billion in federal funds, $1.16 billion in state funds, and $450 million from local and other sources. Meanwhile, Quinn said recently he doesn’t support a long-term transportation funding plan put forward by the *Transportation for Illinois Coalition* [17] that recommends an increase in vehicle registration fees, adding a sales tax to oil changes and car
washes, and an increase in the gas tax, WUIS-FM reported [18]. He isn’t offering any solutions of his own yet but says he’ll wait for an as-yet-unnamed, bipartisan panel of legislators to figure out a plan.

- **Iowa:** A gas tax increase appears unlikely to succeed in the waning days of the legislative session, Radio Iowa reported this week [19].

- **Michigan:** House Republicans are pushing a new, long-term approach to addressing the state’s transportation funding needs, The Detroit Free Press reported recently [20]. The plan would pump between $456 million and $494 million a year through 2018 into road projects (only about half of what experts say is needed). The plan calls for: a repeal of the 19-cents-per gallon gas tax, replacing it with a 6 percent wholesale tax on gas, permanently dedicating the state’s 6 percent sales tax on fuel to road funding (it goes into the general fund now), shifting 1 percent of the state’s use tax to roads, increasing permit fees for overweight and oversized trucks, and requiring road builders to provide a five-year warranty on any project worth $5 million or more while also requiring that contractors maintain the roads that they build.

- **Missouri:** The House this week ended a fight over whether bike routes would be eligible for transportation funding and approved a proposed constitutional amendment that would install a 1 percent sales tax to raise $639 million for transportation projects, The Columbia Daily Tribune reported [21]. A similar measure died in the Senate last year. If approved, it would go before voters in November.

- **New Hampshire:** Two House committees met in joint session this week to consider a Senate-passed 4-cent gas tax increase, The Concord Monitor reported [22]. Opponents testified the increase would cost consumers and truckers at the pump and lead to higher prices on goods and services. The legislation in question would increase revenues available for highway improvements for two years and then earmark about half of them to pay off $200 million in debt used to finish the expansion of I-93. The tax increase would expire in about 20 years once the debt is paid off.

- **New Jersey:** The Times of Trenton columnist George Amick argues [23] that a gas tax increase is what the Garden State needs but he concedes it’s highly unlikely to happen. “Other steps would include amending the constitution to forbid use of revenue from motor fuels for anything other than transportation ... and automatically linking future gas tax increases to the inflation rate,” he writes. “As cars become more fuel efficient and gasoline use declines, New Jersey also should consider converting the gas tax to a miles-traveled fee, as Oregon has done. But as long as Statehouse elected officials refuse to take minimal commonsense actions, there’s little point in talking about anything more ambitious.” New Jersey Spotlight reported recently [24] on how Gov. Chris Christie’s reliance on borrowing has put the future of the state’s Transportation Trust Fund in jeopardy.

- **Oklahoma:** Transportation Director Mike Patterson warned this week that several major road projects in the state will face significant delays if the state legislature moves forward with a plan to divert hundreds of millions of dollars from transportation to education over the next several years, the Associated Press reported [25].

- **Oregon:** The cancellation of the Columbia River Crossing project will mean that previously committed federal dollars will now be spent on as many as eight smaller projects in the state, The Statesman Journal reported [26]. Also this week, Portland Commissioner Steve Novick says he’s likely to support a plan to charge city-dwellers an $8 to $12 monthly street fee to address the city’s transportation network, The Oregonian reported [27]. That’s after the results of a recent poll showed that support for a fee at either level jumped over the 50 percent mark once respondents learned about the projects the additional revenues would pay for. Novick said the poll also showed respondents found the street fee preferable to an income tax, sales tax or bond measure.

- **Pennsylvania:** Gov. Tom Corbett recently announced [28] hundreds of additional transportation projects that will get underway this year thanks to the revenue package approved last year.

- **Wisconsin:** In last week’s blog post [29], I wrote about the state’s effort to reboot the transportation funding conversation. The LaCrosse Tribune reported this week [30] on the first step in that process—the first of nine planned town hall meetings on the subject.
Tollroads News spoke recently with Sue Gander of the National Governors Association’s Center for Best Practices. Among the topics she addressed was state transportation financing tools.

Before departing Stateline for Governing last week, Dan Vock turned in a piece looking at states trying to save money by turning responsibility for some local roads over to localities.

**Public-Private Partnerships & Tolling**

In a new report called “Following the Money 2014,” the U.S. PIRG Education Fund rates the 50 states on providing online access to government spending data. The report notes that transparency websites can give users a window into two often murky areas of government that deal with transportation: quasi-public agencies such as toll authorities and private companies administering asset leases under public-private partnerships.

**Indiana:** The state has achieved commercial close on its second availability payment P3 project—the fifth of sixth planned sections of I-69, which will link Evansville with Indianapolis, according to Nossaman’s Infra Insight Blog.

The international experience with public-private partnerships was the focus of a hearing this week on Capitol Hill. You can watch the hearing and read the written statements from witnesses here.

**State Multi-Modal Strategies**

**Transit**

The Atlantic Cities blog had a piece recently assessing whether U.S. light rail systems have been worth the investment. Yonah Freemark writes that “Five U.S. metros (Buffalo, Portland, Sacramento, San Diego and San Jose) opened light rail systems in the 1980s to great fanfare.” But even as light rail remains the most appealing mode for public transportation investment for many cities and as 16 regions are poised to follow in their footsteps, “it doesn’t take much digging to find that over the past thirty years, these initial five systems in themselves neither rescued the center cities of their respective regions nor resulted in higher transit use—the dual goals of those first-generation lines.” Freemark says one of the lessons of those five light rail projects is that spending on new lines is not enough. “Increases in transit use are only possible when the low costs of driving and parking are addressed, and when government and private partners work together to develop more densely near transit stations. None of the cities that built new light rail lines in the 1980s understood this reality sufficiently.”

**District of Columbia:** Ashley Gold of Elevation DC looks at the potential economic impact of the DC streetcar in a recent piece.

**Florida:** Charlie Crist says he may look to restart the Orlando-Tampa high-speed rail project that Gov. Rick Scott canceled, if he wins back the governor’s chair this year, The Orlando Sentinel reported.

**Illinois:** Two transit advocacy groups—the Center for Neighborhood Technology and the Active Transportation Alliance—have proposed a map for a possible future Chicago transit system, Emily Badger of The Washington Post’s Wonkblog reported recently. It would include extensions and modernization of the existing system, new rail lines that bypass downtown, a bus rapid transit corridor running the length of the city, and a new high-speed bus service into the suburbs. It could cost on the order of $20 billion. Mayor Rahm Emanuel was at a recent event to kick off a campaign to start looking for that money. Supporters say if Cook County would approve a local funding stream such as a half-cent sales tax increase, the city could tap federal matching funds and make the whole project possible. The campaign already has a website to help sell the public on the plan. “Even if any of this never comes to pass, there’s a value to wildly ambitious infrastructure proposals in an era when so many cities are wrangling over the fate of a few miles of streetcar,” Badger writes. “This is how cities expand the debate from one about incremental new capacity to one about job access and real estate value and economic growth.”
• **Rhode Island:** Despite previous funding setbacks, Providence officials will once again seek a federal TIGER grant to provide $29 million for an estimated $114 million streetcar project, *Railway Age* reported. [40]

• **Texas:** *The Atlantic* Cities this week pondered the question “Can Houston Learn to Love Light Rail?” [41]

• **Virginia:** The contractor building the first phase of the Silver Line Metro extension through Tysons Corner now says problems that have plagued the rail line have been corrected and the project has achieved substantial completion, *WAMU* reported [42]. Dulles Transit Partners originally made the completion claim back in February but the contractor failed to meet seven out of the 12 requirements for certification by the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority. The project is being paid for primarily from tolls paid by motorists on the Dulles Toll Road but the Airports Authority, Fairfax and Loudoun counties and the state of Virginia are also chipping in.

• **Ben Adler at Grist writes this week** [43] about recent efforts by some state governments to block the transit plans of cities.

• **Mary Ebeling of the State Smart Transportation Initiative looked at** [44] new strategies in transit finance in a recent piece.

**Active Transport**

• **David A. Garcia on the Stockton City Limits blog points out** [45] what he sees as some flaws in that recent Smart Growth America report *I told you about last week* [46] on “Measuring Sprawl.” [47]

• **Minnesota:** Andy Singer of the St. Paul Bicycle Coalition blogs for Streets.mn this week about “Vulnerable Road User Protection Laws” [48] around the country. Portland Bike Lawyer Ray Thomas has more on the legal concept here [49].

• The Environmental Protection Agency has a new report on “Smart Growth and Economic Success: Strategies for Local Governments.” [50]

**Traffic Safety**

• **AAA NewsRoom has a post** [51] with some things you may not know about distracted driving.

• Also be sure to check out our new Capitol Research brief on “Enforcement of Texting While Driving Bans” [52] and my *follow-up blog post* [53] from this week.

• The United States is pushing for a United Nations resolution in support of international texting bans, *The Hill* [54] reported [54].

**Happy Trails**

...to Janet Oakley. The director of policy and government relations at AASHTO was named by South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley [55] as her choice to lead the state department of transportation. The nomination is subject to approval by the state Senate. Oakley was a speaker at our 2009 CSG annual conference in La Quinta, California. We also talked to her for our 2012 Capitol Research brief on “Accelerating Highway Project Delivery Under MAP-21.” [56]

By: Saturday, April 12, 2014 at 03:57 PM

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