

3 House Committees Will Mark Up 5-Year, \$260 Billion Bill Next Week

Three House of Representatives committees will mark up next week a five-year, \$260 billion highway and transit reauthorization bill. The key policy legislative language is expected to be released by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on Monday or Tuesday, followed by a committee meeting Thursday morning to consider amendments and vote on the bill, the "American Energy & Infrastructure Jobs Act."

Senate Finance & Banking Panels to Consider Reauthorization Next Week

The last two Senate committees whose approvals are necessary before a surface transportation reauthorization package can be called up on the floor will act next week, Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chairwoman Barbara Boxer, D-California, said during a press conference Thursday.

Both the Senate Finance Committee and the Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee will meet next week to mark up the revenue and transit components of the two-year, \$109 billion legislation, Boxer said. The Finance Committee must identify \$12 billion in revenue sources to pay for the bill's cost beyond what the Highway Trust Fund is projected to be able to cover.

Boxer's committee has already approved the highway portions of the bill, "Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century." The Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee has passed the highway safety and transportation research pieces

AASHTO Joins 1,000+ Organizations in Letter to Congress Pressing for Action

With just two months remaining on the current federal highway and transit program extension, the Americans for Transportation Mobility coalition delivered Wednesday an open letter to Congress pressing for action on a multiyear reauthorization bill. The letter is signed by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials as well as more than 1,000 companies, other organizations, and chambers of commerce from all 50 states.

Wednesday's letter marked the launch of a multifaceted campaign to tell Congress to "Make Transportation Job #1" and to pass a highway and transit bill early this spring. Legislation is advancing in the House and the Senate.

"Addressing our transportation challenges is critical to economic growth and national competitiveness," Janet Kavinoky, vice president of Americans for Transportation Mobility, said in a statement. "Our country can't get back on its feet economically if we can't move people and goods efficiently."

Heritage Foundation Report Explores Pluses, Pitfalls of Transportation PPPs

Public/private partnerships have a proven ability to raise substantial money for big surface transportation projects -- especially those adding needed capacity in congested corridors -- but using that funding approach doesn't make sense for all improvements, concludes a recently released report from the Heritage Foundation.

The report underscores how states and the federal government, facing tight budget restraints and a decline in revenues, must find alternative financial resources for key transportation infrastructure projects such as maintaining and expanding the capacity of the Interstate Highway System. PPPs, while not the solution to every transportation infrastructure challenge, can be used to take on at least some of the needs provided that the federal government allows states more latitude to leverage that option, the foundation explains.

"Under the right circumstances, public/private partnerships could play a targeted role," according

to the report.

A Virginia initiative adding 14 miles of High Occupancy/Toll lanes in the median of the Capital Beltway (Interstate 495) is highlighted. This work is being managed through a partnership between the Virginia Department of Transportation and a private company formed by Australia's toll-road developer Transurban and the U.S.-based Fluor Corp.

The jointly financed project is expected to be completed next year. Benefits include adding new road capacity in one of the nation's most congested regions, quicker commutes, the creation of thousands of construction and engineering jobs, and the replacement of aging infrastructure such as more than 50 bridges and overpasses.

PPPs should not be seen by policymakers as a panacea for addressing all transportation infrastructure gaps across the nation, however, the foundation states in its study. Other innovative and traditional financing solutions remain needed.

"There are too few financially viable P3 projects to meet the national need for new highway capacity and to modernize existing roads," according to the report. "No amount of enabling legislation will bring private investors into projects that are not financeable and very few highways could support themselves on tolls alone."

The six-page report, "Can Public/Private Partnerships Fill the Transportation Funding Gap?," is available at bit.ly/P3-Report.