

U.S. House Punts On Long-Term Highway and Transit Investment

MARCH 30, 2012

Despite passing the U.S. Senate by a bipartisan 74-22 vote earlier this month, legislation reauthorizing how our nation's highway and transit programs are funded stalled this week in the U.S. House. Rather than vote on the Senate's package, known as MAP-21 ("Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century," a good summary of which can be found [here](#)), the House temporarily extended the existing law, known as SAFETEA-LU, another 90 days yesterday, ostensibly to give itself more time to get its proverbial ducks in a row on a long-term bill. The Senate quickly passed the temporary extension as well, and President Obama is expected to sign it into law immediately. Assuming that occurs, it will be the **ninth time** SAFETEA-LU has been extended since its expiration on September 30, 2009. ENR's coverage of this week's events can be found [here](#).

The previous extension of SAFETEA-LU was due to expire at midnight tomorrow, which would have thrown prosecution of existing highway and transit work into utter disarray and cost scores of construction workers their jobs. From that standpoint, a 90-day stopgap measure is certainly better than no action at all.

But this is no way to invest in our nation's surface transportation needs. Without a multi-year reauthorization package signed into law, state departments of transportation simply cannot plan, finance and let major capital projects with any degree of confidence that federal funding actually will be available to help pay for those planned projects. And when state officials are reluctant to move forward on major capital improvements, the entire industry -- not to mention the broader economy -- suffers.

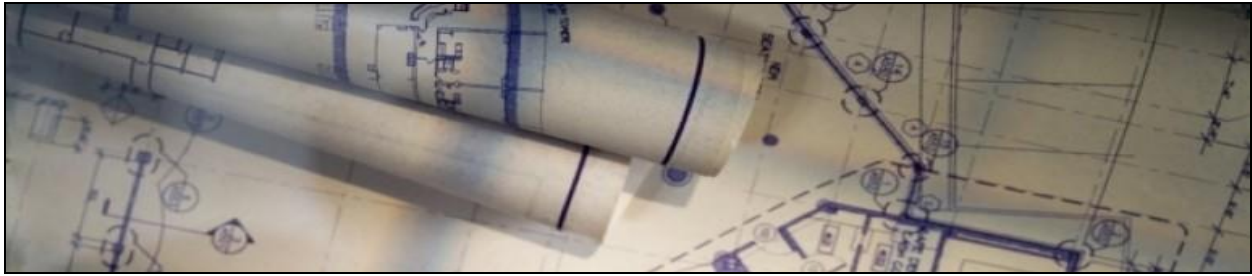
This joint statement issued yesterday by Peter Ruane, CEO of the American Road and Transportation Builders Association ("ARTBA") and Steve Sandherr, CEO of the Associated General Contractors of America ("AGC"), sums it up pretty succinctly:

We commend the House of Representatives and Senate for passing legislation to ensure the continued operation of the federal highway and public transportation programs as the 2012 construction season begins cranking up.



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This action notwithstanding, extension after extension of these programs is no substitute for a multi-year reauthorization that could begin to address the nation's staggering infrastructure challenges.

The current surface transportation law, SAFETEA-LU, expired more than 910 days ago. We respect the legislative process and the right of both the House and Senate to pass their own bill. With an overwhelming bipartisan majority, the Senate has passed its multi-year bill. It is now the responsibility of the House of Representatives to either advance its own alternative or utilize another mechanism to allow the two chambers to reconcile their differences.

Given the bipartisan support in both chambers for critical transportation policy reforms and proactive steps to shore up the Highway Trust Fund's fiscal outlook, the surface transportation bill is one of the few measures before Congress this year with a realistic prospect of becoming law.

While we supported the extension approved today to prevent a shutdown of essential infrastructure improvements across the nation, that support should not be confused as acceptance of inaction on a multi-year reauthorization bill. Our members are growing increasingly frustrated that Congress seems incapable of passing critical legislation that improves the flow of commerce and promotes economic growth. The construction industry continues to suffer from chronic unemployment and the continued delay in enacting a longer term bill prohibits them from expanding their workforces and investing in new equipment. It is unfortunate that a program that has traditionally enjoyed strong bipartisan support is being used as a means to advance political instead of policy objectives.

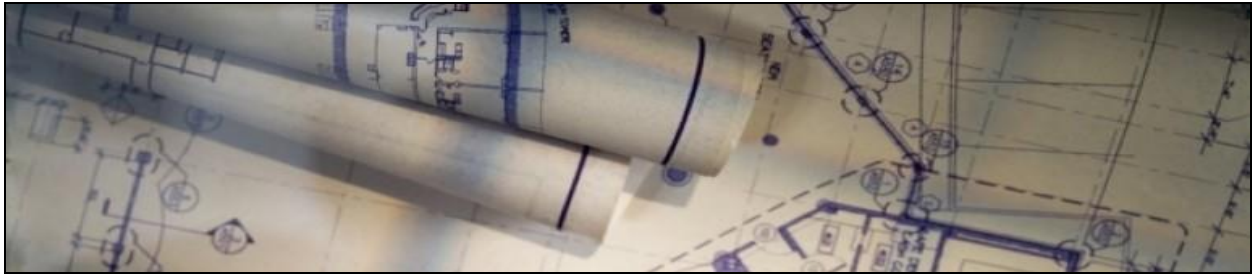
The federal highway and public transportation programs have been governed by extension for 30 months. Congress can and must do better.

I'll be tracking the House's progress in passing a long-term reauthorization bill, so please stay tuned.



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