



Transportation Update – May 14, 2021

Happy Infrastructure Week!

May 10-14 was designated as Infrastructure Week with many efforts around the country to highlight the need for increased investments to repair and replace aging infrastructure and build for the future.

During the week, President Biden and US DOT Secretary Pete Buttigieg spoke at numerous events and the President met at the White House with the top leaders: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell. The discussion was seen as productive but more work is needed on the definition of "infrastructure" and the options for funding legislation.



President Biden yesterday met with key Republican Senators and had further discussions about possible compromise on an infrastructure deal.

Biden, Vice President Harris, and Transportation Secretary Buttigieg met with the Republican minority leaders of five Senate committees:

Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) – Environment and Public Works
Roger Wicker (R-MS) – Commerce, Science and Transportation
Pat Toomey (R-PA) – Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs (mass transit)
John Barrasso (R-WY) – Energy and Natural Resources
Mike Crapo (R-ID) – Finance

The meeting led to promises from Republicans that they would come back with a counter proposal next week.

[GOP readies new offer after 'productive' Biden huddle](#)

At President Biden's request, Senate Republicans said they will prepare a new infrastructure offer they hope to send to the White House by early next week.

Republicans last month offered \$568 billion for roads, bridges, broadband and water projects but have so far resisted Biden's \$2.2 trillion infrastructure proposal as too broad. The president is also seeking an additional \$1.8 trillion for child care and other "social infrastructure."

In addition, Republicans remain steadfastly against Biden's proposal to hike the corporate tax rate to 28% over 15 years, which would undo the lower rate the GOP enacted without Democratic support in 2017.

Biden added that both sides presented their cases and agreed to keep talking. "We didn't compromise on anything," he told reporters at the White House.

"What we did was I laid out what I thought we should be doing, how it should be paid for, and my colleagues in the Senate came back and said they'll come back to me with a counteroffer of what they are prepared to do and fund and how to fund it. And then we'll talk again next week."

[Republicans are setting a tax trap for Biden](#)

Yahoo Finance May 13, 2021

[Rick Newman](#)

·Senior Columnist

Republicans in Congress want to raise the federal gas tax. Yes, the same Republicans who oppose tax hikes most of the rest of the time.

So why do Republicans favor user fees now? Because they would force Biden to break a core campaign promise, damaging him politically. Biden pledged not to raise taxes on households earning less than \$400,000 per year, and any user fee applied broadly to the public would violate that pledge. User fees are actually a sensible and proven way to pay for big projects, yet Biden, for better or worse, has effectively ruled them out as a funding source for his ambitious plans.

Everybody in Washington knows this is the game. Virtually no Republicans would vote to raise the federal gas tax, if it actually came up for a vote, and no Democrat would vote to put Biden in the position of breaking a campaign promise. Biden would veto such a bill if it landed on his desk. Yet Rs and Ds are pretending to negotiate as if Republicans would really raise the gas tax and Democrats might be open to the idea.

Biden could turn this around by saying he is, in fact, taxing the users of infrastructure to pay for his new plans. Businesses clearly benefit from improved transportation, since they move products, workers and data around and rely heavily on all forms of shipping. Paying more in corporate income tax for a more efficient economy ought to be a fair tradeoff.

Transportation Earmarks for Minnesota are Requested

Members of Minnesota's Congressional Delegation have submitted some [requests to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee](#) for inclusion in a new surface transportation authorization act. Minnesota members requested a number of projects around the state.

Senators Klobuchar and Smith are currently accepting project requests with a **deadline of Friday, May 21st** for submission through their Senate websites.

Requirements that need to be met for consideration:

- The request is for a program, project, or organization in Minnesota.
- The entity submitting this request is a public or non-profit entity. *For-profit entities are not eligible.*
- This request must have demonstrated community support.

Senator Klobuchar: <https://oampublic.senate.gov/constituent/login/e14a88fc-766b-4798-a8e1-1e0c5d6e0e8b/>

Senator Smith: <https://oampublic.senate.gov/constituent/login/c800e6dd-d8d5-4e6b-a93f-3ed293484420/>

Lawmakers happily embrace return of earmarks to highway bill

Members hope their earmarks will be included in the reauthorization of a five-year surface transportation law enacted in 2015. A one-year extension of that law expires on Sept. 30.

In all, House lawmakers requested \$14.9 billion in earmarks in the surface transportation bill, which is still being drafted. More than 70 percent of the earmarks and funds requested came from Democrats, the CQ Roll Call analysis showed. By comparison, Republicans asked for about 25 percent of the projects, accounting for nearly 28 percent of the dollars.

In the lead-up to the release of the requests, DeFazio indicated that each member will be able to designate an equal amount, between \$15 million and \$20 million, for specific surface transportation projects regardless of whether they vote for or against the bill.

House Democrats and Republicans seek more than \$20 billion in earmarks as once-maligned practice returns

The return of congressional earmarks has sparked a massive dash for cash on Capitol Hill, where more than 300 House Democrats and Republicans have sought nearly \$21 billion in federal funding to help their home districts and pet projects — and shore up their reelection prospects.

Every House Democrat except one has submitted an earmark request. In total, they have sought funding for nearly \$14 billion in projects, while just over half of the chamber's Republicans have appealed for a combined \$7 billion, according to new congressional data analyzed by The Washington Post. The breakdown reflects the bipartisan appetite for federal aid, even as some in the GOP remain wary about resurrecting a process they helped to dismantle about a decade ago.

Many lawmakers' new petitions for funding seek to fix crumbling roads, bridges and pipes in their political backyards, illustrating Democrats and Republicans' shared interest in infrastructure as the debate continues around one of President Biden's economic policy priorities.

Rep. Garret Graves (R), whose Louisiana district includes Baton Rouge, asked for more money than any other lawmaker: He sought roughly \$1 billion in transportation-related earmarks, hoping to fix what he described in a statement as one of the worst highway bottlenecks in the country. Rep. Kim Schrier (D), meanwhile, submitted more than \$900 million in requests to widen highways and repair bridges in her western Washington district.



Drivers slow to return to MnPass lanes

Traffic volumes and congestion on Twin Cities freeways are rising this spring, but apparently not high enough to persuade rush hour drivers to return to MnPass lanes. Trips taken by solo drivers who pay to use them are down more than 50% from a year ago, despite a slight increase in the first quarter of the year, according to data from the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

As a result, MnDOT has taken a financial hit. The agency typically collects about \$432,000 a month in tolls, but with the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, it took in about \$179,000. The following month, it netted just \$12,770 as total trips hit rock bottom.

MnPass saw some recovery last fall as some restrictions were eased. Drivers made 69,000 trips in MnPass lanes in October before a second stay-at-home order during the holidays started another decline. From November through January, drivers made just over 54,000 trips each month.

That rose to more than 57,000 in February and 68,500 in March. But revenue in March totaled just \$30,800, data show.

[Officials offer options for Blatnik Bridge replacement](#)

Officials from the Wisconsin and Minnesota departments of transportation presented a bevy of options Tuesday, May 11, that could one day replace the Blatnik Bridge, including tunnels.

While all options would continue to use the Garfield interchange in Duluth, the options for Superior may or may not land on Hammond Avenue in the future.

Two options would use U.S. Highway 53 as the Superior approach to the new bridge: one in the vicinity of the existing onramp in the interchange and the other at Connors Point. One option does keep the approach on Hammond Avenue, but is likely to have the new bridge constructed east or west of the existing alignment. That would allow the Blatnik Bridge to remain open during the three-year construction project expected to get underway in 2028, according to Pat Huston, MnDOT District 1 major projects engineer.

[MN Legislature all but certain to need overtime to balance state budget](#)

Minnesota lawmakers are all but certain to miss Monday's deadline to pass a state budget before adjourning, setting up a June special session, leading Democrats said Wednesday.

House Speaker Melissa Hortman, DFL-Brooklyn Park, told reporters Wednesday afternoon that there simply isn't enough time left — even if Democrats and Republicans could reach agreement — for all the procedural, clerical and parliamentary work needed to beat Monday's deadline, which is contained in the state Constitution.

The effect on regular Minnesotans is negligible — as long as both sides and Gov. Tim Walz can agree on a two-year spending plan before July 1. If they miss that deadline, state government will be forced to shut down.

A special session of the Legislature is already on the calendar for June 14 to renew or rescind Walz's pandemic peacetime emergency powers. That date, as well as a fresh river of federal funding flowing into the state, created unusual circumstances that appear to have dampened the usually frantic nature of mid-May budget negotiations.



Action in Other State

[Gov. Little signs historic transportation funding bill](#)

The latest bill signed into law by Idaho Gov. Brad Little is a historic one. Little signed House Bill 362 into law Monday, a [transportation bill](#) that directs \$80 million toward roads and other projects. It allows the state to bond for up to \$1.6 billion for transportation infrastructure projects statewide over a 20-year period.

The governor's office says this was passed without raising Idahoans' taxes or fees. Little says he did it by redirecting a larger share of the existing sales tax to the funds that support transportation projects.

Fractured Beam May Close Key Mississippi River Crossing for Months

Transportation officials in Arkansas and Tennessee say “a catastrophic event” was averted with the discovery of a fractured steel beam in the I-40 Mississippi River Bridge in Memphis. But it could be months before the busy mile-long crossing is fully repaired and reopened to traffic.

The crack in one of two welded 24 by 32 in., 900-ft-long continuous beams that form one of the bridge’s two tied-arch truss navigation spans was discovered May 11 during a scheduled annual inspection of the nearly 50-year-old crossing, also known as the Hernando De Soto Bridge. According to the Arkansas Dept. of Transportation, which shares the cost of operating the bridge with Tennessee’s DOT, the “fatigue-type fracture” likely resulted from decades of constant traffic movement, rather than a vessel impact or weather-related cause.

Missouri Gas Tax Increase Goes to Governor

What happened: Missouri lawmakers May 11 approved raising the state gas tax 12.5 cents per gallon over five years. The bill could increase funding for roads and bridges by \$514 million annually. The measure also would increase electric vehicle fees and permit residents to seek refunds of passenger vehicle motor fuel taxes paid in the state. It also authorizes a task force to analyze and make recommendations regarding the impact of electric vehicle adoption on transportation funding.

Why it matters: Missouri hasn’t increased its gas tax in 25 years. The state has struggled to raise new revenue for transportation due to a constitutional law requiring voter approval on any significant tax or fee increase. Lawmakers circumvented the requirement by limiting the proposed gas tax increase to 2.5 cents annually.

What’s next: Gov. Mike Parsons (R) is expected to sign the bill into law before the 15-day deadline.

Key resources: A Missouri Chamber of Commerce analysis says the increase would have a nearly \$2 billion economic impact for the state and create 17,000 jobs.

Missouri lawmakers pass gas tax hike that would begin this fall with refund option

Missouri drivers will likely pay more at the pump starting this fall after lawmakers passed a bill to raise the state’s gas tax for the first time in more than two decades.

The measure, sent to Gov. Mike Parson’s desk late Tuesday night, would add 2.5 cents to the current 17-cent-per-gallon tax beginning in October to pay for road and bridge repairs. It would rise over the next five years to a 12.5-cent-per-gallon hike.

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