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Bipartisan Push for Vast Transportation Bill

By [JENNIFER STEINHAUER](#)

While Republicans and Democrats fight over how to pay for the extension of a payroll tax cut — or whether to let it continue at all — a bipartisan cadre of House members has quietly been coalescing around the notion of a large-scale, long-term transportation bill to address the country's myriad infrastructure needs.

In a letter to [President Obama](#), more than 110 House members from both sides of the aisle are asking the White House to support a six-year transportation measure that would cover a wide array of transportation projects.

The letter does not specify how much those projects would cost.

In a nod to the austerity measures currently in vogue on the Hill when it comes to new projects, the letter says that “given our fiscal challenges, we recognize that a six-year transportation authorization will need to be paid for.”

“We stand willing to work with your administration on a variety of funding options,” it said.

Transportation funding is popular across party lines, as most districts have significant needs, and transportation projects create jobs, help attract businesses and reduce traffic.

The letter is signed by an unusual array of lawmakers, including Representative [Jerrold Nadler](#), a liberal Democrat from New York, and Representative Tim Scott of South Carolina, one of the most conservative Republican freshmen.

The idea for the letter belongs to two Democratic representatives, John Carney of Delaware and Jim Cooper of Tennessee, and two Republicans, Aaron Schock of Illinois and Pat Meehan of Pennsylvania.

Speaker [John A. Boehner of Ohio](#) has resisted transportation authorization bills, because they are known vehicles for earmarks, but earlier this year offered a bill without earmarks that would authorize transportation funding for five years. The legislation would be paid for by expanding domestic energy production, including opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska for drilling and shale oil exploration.

Transportation authorization funding — one of a series of short-term extensions — is set to run out early next year.

The letter follows:

Dec. 5, 2011

President Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

We are writing to respectfully urge your full support for a long-term transportation reauthorization. Such legislation will address our urgent transportation and infrastructure needs, create jobs for Americans and give the private sector important incentives to locate, invest and hire here in the United States.

The need for a long-term transportation authorization is clear to any American who drives a car or truck, rides the rails or flies in an airplane. First, our aging infrastructure risks creating a safety hazard for Americans. The American Society for Civil Engineers (ASCE) gives our transportation infrastructure a grade of "D," and a recent federal report estimated that more than 11 percent of the nation's bridges need timely repairs to avoid unsafe structural deficiencies.

Second, transportation backlogs increase costs for small businesses and hurt job creation and economic growth. The ASCE reports that the cost of failing to invest in the nation's roads and bridges would total \$2.1 trillion in lost economic growth by 2020, costing 877,000 jobs. The ASCE went on to find that congestion by 2020 could cost us \$276 billion a year in lost time and inefficiencies. As a result of using more fuel, lost productivity and accelerated auto-wear on worsening roads, the overall cost to a family's household budget would be \$1,060 a year.

To address these urgent economic, transportation and safety needs, we believe our country needs a six-year, fully funded and paid-for transportation reauthorization with investments above current funding. Short-term extensions fail to recognize that meaningful, large-scale transportation projects take years to plan, approve and implement. The traditional six-year time-frame allows state departments of transportation to prepare for substantial infrastructure projects.

A modern, safe and efficient transportation authorization will not only create jobs now for the construction industry – facing a 13.3 percent unemployment

rate – but it will also set the table for long-term job creation and economic growth. Global employers considering a presence in the United States will require a modern transportation infrastructure that enables them to move their finished products to the global market place in a timely and cost-efficient manner. Our aging and congested system is a strong disincentive for firms to expand their presence in the United States and create jobs here at home. A long-term transportation authorization will help make America more competitive in the global marketplace and create jobs in all sectors of our economy.

Given our fiscal challenges, we recognize that a six-year transportation authorization will need to be paid-for. We stand willing to work with your Administration on a variety of funding options. We have many ideas, but realize they are just a start and are happy to discuss others with you as well.

Thank you in advance for your help in supporting a long-term transportation reauthorization that will create a modern, safe and efficient infrastructure system and create jobs and promote long-term economic growth. We look forward to working with you further on this issue.

Sincerely,
Aaron Schock
Jim Cooper
Patrick Meehan
John C. Carney Jr.