

DAILY NEWS CLIPS

FEDERAL NEWS CLIPS

April 6, 2012

HIGHWAY BILL PASSAGE IN DOUBT UNTIL AFTER ELECTION

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Z6 Magazine

April 5, 2012

Congress has dashed any hopes of the passage of a long-term highway bill before the elections. The passage of another short-term funding extension has advocates of a federal highway bill feeling like they may have come to the end of the road figuratively and perhaps literally.

President Obama signed the temporary measure that will only fund highway projects through June 30. There were hopes by those in the transportation industry that a multi-year bill would have been passed by the House that would be similar to the measure that passed in the Senate 74-22.

The short-term continuing resolution is the ninth one of the previous multi-year highway and transit bill that originally would have expired in 2009. Due to the inability of the Democratic-controlled Senate and the Republican-controlled House to come to terms on the longer bill, the continuing resolution is the result of their efforts.

Transportation advocates such as President Edward Wytkind of the AFL-CIO Transportation Trades Department (TTD) are doubtful that Congress will pass the long-term bill once the 90-day continuing resolution ends. He attributes this feeling to the lack of the two parties being able to work things out. He plans to step up his organization's efforts during the Congressional recess to prod Republicans that opposed the Senate version of the bill to vote in favor of the long-term legislation.

House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) strikes a different note and expects the House to pass the multi-year legislation once they return from recess. Boehner has once referred to the transportation legislation as one of the components of his signature jobs plan. He stated that the House will finalize the language in the legislation and promptly approve the bill after they are back in session. Once it is complete, he said he'll send it over to the Senate.

Many others that support the transportation legislation that were initially hopeful for a long-term bill are not very optimistic at this point. They are becoming less sure whether Congress will approve a longer version of the legislation. Janet Kavinoky, the executive director of transportation and infrastructure

with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce felt that House of Representatives will have to work hard to come up with a multi-year bill that can make it into conference committee. She feels that if legislation doesn't get completed after the recess, it will probably get delayed until after the elections.

Kavinoky thinks that if the bill is delayed until the lame duck session after the elections that it stands even less of a chance of getting passed. There are too many other important items on the agenda for Congress during that time frame. However, she said her organization will be pushing the legislators hard during the recess to support a multi-year bill.

Other supporters from the transportation industry had mixed emotions about the 90-day extension. While they were happy that funding was extended through the short-term bill, they were disappointed that a longer term bill could not be voted on. The extension will provide funding that will not disrupt projects already underway in the transportation program.

Many of the transportation supporters hope that the two parties in the House will put aside their political differences and find a way to support bipartisan legislation that will get enacted. They hope that it will be similar to the bill already approved by the Senate. They are concerned that there are too many jobs at stake. The future of the American economy is riding on the outcome of a multi-year bill that will provide dollars for highway, bridge and transit projects.

Originally published here: <http://z6mag.com/business/highway-bill-passage-in-doubt-until-after-election-167418.html>