

# THE BOND BUYER

## House members push for infrastructure bill with PABs

By

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WASHINGTON – Eighty-six Democrats and Republicans in the House are urging the chamber’s leaders to develop and pass a long-term, bipartisan infrastructure bill that increases direct federal investment, fixes the Highway Trust Fund, and strengthens private activity bonds.

The group, led by Reps. Earl Blumenauer, D-Ore., and Tom Rice, R-S.C., made the request in a recent letter sent to House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., and Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif.

“Inaction is not an option,” the members wrote in the letter. “We have an opportunity to pass a comprehensive infrastructure bill that provides the funding and financing tools to truly transform the economy.”

The nation’s infrastructure has suffered “decades of neglect [that is] hurting middle class families in every congressional district,” they wrote. “In 2017, the average American motorist spent over 40 hours in traffic, costing them \$1,445 due to wasted time, fuel, and higher prices for household goods. Today one in five miles of highway pavement is in poor condition and the average motorist spends \$523 a year on maintenance due to rough roads.”

The same is true for critical systems supporting electrical infrastructure, data, and information services, they wrote.

“For too long, Congress has ignored the needs of communities across America while squandering the investments of past generations. Short-term fixes won’t work,” the House members wrote.

They said that any bill should do five things, including: “increase direct federal infrastructure investment; address the long-term solvency of existing federal funding accounts, like the Highway Trust Fund; and complement and strengthen existing financing tools such as municipal bonds and private activity bonds.”

The bill should also “strengthen efficiencies to improve federal permitting processes without losing key public protections” and “encourage active participation among all levels of government and between the public and private sectors without shifting federal responsibilities,” the members wrote.

The letter comes after a senior aide to House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Bill Shuster, R-Pa., said last month that Shuster is trying to craft infrastructure legislation that could be offered as soon as this summer with the hope it would be passed by Congress before it adjourns. The aide made the remarks to Bloomberg Government and they were reported by Transport Topics.

Shuster announced in January that he won't seek re-election this year and will retire at the end of the session. He would like to play a major role in an infrastructure bill passed by Congress before he leaves. His chairmanship of the committee is limited to three terms so he could not remain at the panel's helm if he stays in Congress.

Trump sent Congress his infrastructure plan in February. He proposed spending \$200 billion of federal funds over 10 years to leverage \$1.5 trillion in infrastructure investment from state and local officials as well as the private sector. The proposal did not contain any revenue-raising provisions. Administration officials said the proposal would be paid for with cuts to existing federal programs.

The proposal is considered virtually dead. Most lawmakers balked at the small amount of federal funding and the lack of pay-fors. They didn't like the idea that existing infrastructure programs would be cut.