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Wright: AASHTO Waiting for Infrastructure Plan, Sees Need for New Federal Funding

AASHTO Journal

The CEO of the group representing state departments of transportation said his members are waiting for details from the Trump administration on how to fund the president's waiting infrastructure plan and how it would affect states as they seek help for needed projects.



Bud Wright, executive director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, told CSPAN's Washington Journal program Jan. 4 that right now the nation is not adequately investing in infrastructure and that AASHTO sees the need to come up with more federal funding.

Excerpts from his remarks are included in the Transportation TV report below. Readers can [view the entire 25-minute program here](#).

Asked what AASHTO thinks of the reported Trump infrastructure plan, Wright said

association members support the administration's desire to speed up project approvals, and in fact have worked closely with the administration to develop such proposals.

But when asked how its members feel about reports that the plan would try to use some federal funds as "seed money" to entice state and local governments to partner more with private investors to pay for new projects, Wright said the association is waiting for details on how the administration would fund the plan and how much it will rely on financing measures that might require projects to deliver a revenue stream to repay investors.

"We have not yet seen all of the details on what they want to do on funding and finance," he said. "We want to make sure that all of the country is well-served – that rural areas get their share, that every state gets a part of whatever comes out of the infrastructure initiative."

Wright said AASHTO had favored Congress using the huge tax reform bill to carve out new revenue for infrastructure, rather than try to pass a standalone tax or taxes in separate legislation.

The administration has said it wants to allocate \$200 billion in direct federal funding over 10 years to leverage \$1 trillion in total new investment. Wright said that in the context of tax reform that affected trillions of dollars, \$200

billion "would have been a relative blip."

Now, however, he said it would be a big hurdle for lawmakers to cast a separate vote raising taxes to generate new revenue or to find offsetting cuts in other federal programs.

The CSPAN program allows viewers to call in, and one asked whether federal gas tax receipts are in a "lockbox" so they cannot be diverted to other budget needs. Wright explained that they are indeed dedicated to the Highway Trust Fund, but the HTF's revenue stream is not sufficient to cover its costs.

Since the federal gas tax, for instance, has not been increased in 25 years, "it would not be unreasonable for there to be some adjustment in the federal user tax," Wright said.

He added that hiking motor fuel taxes is not the only option, and said some have proposed assessing a fee on freight shipments and vehicle ownership to help pay for transportation.

When one caller challenged the idea of using highway funds for other types of transportation, Wright said the nation's multimodal system needs each part to function well. Without transit and rail systems moving people, he said, the highways in many areas "would be overwhelmed" with traffic.

AASHTO Executive Dir. Bud Wright Talks Transportation Live on ...



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January 05, 2018

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