



# Bipartisan group of lawmakers offers ideas for infrastructure |

BY MALLORY SHELBOURNE - 01/10/18 02:03 PM EST

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The congressional Problem Solvers Caucus on Wednesday released a bipartisan report detailing policy suggestions for a future infrastructure plan.

The report, released by the caucus's Infrastructure Working Group, proposes solutions on how to modernize U.S. infrastructure while maintaining environmental protections and bolstering the national security.

"Unfortunately, due to years of underinvestment and deferred maintenance, America is no longer keeping pace and continues to fall behind other countries," the report says. "By some estimates, the funding gap may be as high as \$2 trillion by 2025 across all sectors of American infrastructure."

Among the suggestions in the report is creating "a rural liaison" for various federal agencies to help those areas seek funding. It also suggests that projects financed by the federal government should take a "Buy America" approach to make sure U.S. goods like steel and iron are used.

"America was a great country because we did great and big things," Rep. Elizabeth Esty (D-Conn.), a co-author of the report, said during its unveiling.

Esty, a member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, pointed to the recent water main break at New York's John F.

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Kennedy airport that caused flooding in the facility and delayed flights as an example of the country’s crumbling infrastructure.

“That’s become all too often what we see in America right now,” she said. “It’s frustrating. It’s expensive. And we can fix it.”

The group's report comes as the Trump administration’s forthcoming infrastructure package appears to be stalling.

The administration previously vowed to produce “detailed legislative principles” for an infrastructure package this month, but the White House said Tuesday that a plan may not come until February, after President Trump delivers his State of the Union address.

Lawmakers are seeking to push infrastructure as a point of rare bipartisan agreement between Democrats and Republicans at a time of heightened tensions after the passage of the Trump tax-cut bill.

Rep. John Katko (R-N.Y.), another co-author of the Problem Solvers's report, said the group met with the Trump administration “many times” as it worked on the report.

“They are excited about this. They are supportive and they’re happy that we’re leading on getting the rollout going and showing that there’s bipartisan support,” he said.

Katko said he believes GOP leadership is also happy with the report, noting he recently mentioned it to Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.).

One potential hurdle for lawmakers is a proposed gas tax hike that has been floated as a means to fund the package. The White House had been eyeing the tax to pay for the plan, but it is deeply unpopular among GOP lawmakers.

Katko on Wednesday dismissed claims their proposal supports an increase to the gas tax. He argued the report simply pushes for ways to provide full funding of the Highway Trust Fund.

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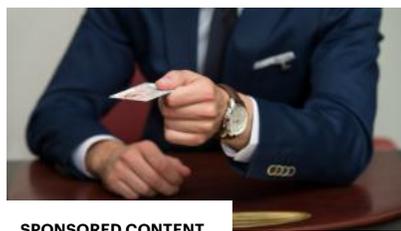
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The new report proposes “an immediate or phased in modernization of the federal gasoline user fee” in order to finance the Highway Trust Fund. It also proposes a yearly registration fee for hybrid electric and entirely electric vehicles.

Katko noted that some vehicles do not pay any gas tax.

“No one in this room is saying, advocating — or it’s certainly not the position of the Problem Solvers Caucus to say that this is a gas tax increase,” Katko said. “It’s not.”

*This story was updated at 4:54 p.m.*