

May 20, 2021

House Republicans Release Their Surface Transportation Proposal

On May 19, 2021, the ranking member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee, Sam Graves (MO-6) released new proposed legislation for reauthorization of the federal surface transportation program. The “Surface Transportation Advanced through Reform, Technology, and Efficient Review Act 2.0” (STARTER Act 2.0) is cosponsored by the ranking members of the T&I subcommittees: Rodney Davis (IL-13), Rick Crawford (AR-1) and Garret Graves (LA-6). It is a five-year \$400 billion bill, representing a 32% increase above FAST Act spending levels and marking the largest proposed GOP spending increase proposal yet, but significantly below the Congressional Democrats’ current thinking.

The STARTER Act 2.0 includes funding for roads, road safety, public transit, and resilience, creating a new grant program for highway projects designed to reduce the risks and costs of natural disasters as well as new resiliency criteria in several other programs. The bill places a priority on rural transportation funding and streamlining project permitting processes. It also touts added flexibility for states and non-federal partners to advance local and regional solutions with decision-making authority to meet their own unique infrastructure needs. The bill excludes an emphasis on climate change mitigation, leaving out incentives for electric vehicles and charging infrastructure.

The STARTER legislation does not address how its proposals would be paid for, which would be addressed later by the House Ways and Means Committee. The STARTER Act 2.0 does support a national pilot program to advance testing for implementation of a vehicle-miles-traveled (VMT) fee at a national scale, designed to address the solvency of the Highway Trust Fund and a potential replacement of the federal motor fuels taxes in years to come. The proposed VMT-fee pilot does allow owners and operators of tolled facilities to serve on a 15-member Advisory Board. Revenue collected under the VMT-fee program will not be considered a toll under section 301, title 23 of U.S. Code. The bill also requires USDOT to establish a national implementation pilot program of a per-mile road-use charge for federal government-owned vehicles by October 1, 2026.

Other selected highlights include:

- A large bridge program provides up to \$4.6B annually for competitive grants to states, groups of states, or federal land management agencies to rebuild or rehabilitate large bridges on the National Highway System or National Freight Highway System. Tolling on funded projects must employ only electronic tolling and be regionally interoperable to the extent practical.
- A community rural bridge program to replace or rehabilitate rural bridges off the federal-aid highway system through formula-based state allocations.
- Provides USDOT authority to reset TIFIA loan rates through September 30, 2022 for borrowers impacted by COVID-19.
- A broad program for advanced transportation technologies aimed to deploy, install, and operate technologies to improve safety, efficiency, system performance, mobility, intermodal connectivity, and infrastructure return on investment. This program may fund electronic pricing, toll collection,

and payment systems, as well as technology that enhances high-occupancy vehicle toll lanes, cordon pricing, or congestion pricing.

- A connected vehicle deployment pilot competitive grant program designed to award projects at least \$10M each. Program goals are to spur connected vehicle deployment and vehicle interactions with mobile devices, infrastructure, and other elements to realize safety, mobility, and environmental benefits and use new forms of data to improve transportation system performance. Partnerships of multiple stakeholders are encouraged, including among public agencies, private companies, and vehicle manufacturers, among others.

Meanwhile, House T&I Committee Chairman Peter DeFazio (OR-4) continues work on his successor to last year's Moving Forward Act (HR-2) by completing a review of more the 2,000 member-designated projects (i.e., earmarks), while also attempting to seek better alignment between his reauthorization bill and the President's American Jobs Plan infrastructure proposal. This bill is expected to be ready for a mark-up early June.

Please feel free to direct any questions to Mark Muriello at mmuriello@ibtta.org.