



INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure advocates hope for bipartisan effort under a new administration

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Transportation advocates say a Biden administration will bring bipartisanship to a future infrastructure bill, even as it remains unclear which party will control the Senate in the next Congress.

President-elect Joe Biden will take office in January, though Democrats face an uphill battle to gain control of the Senate. Control of the chamber is likely to rest on two Georgia Senate races headed to a Jan. 5 runoff. Currently, Republicans and Democrats have each secured 48 seats in the next Congress, according to the Associated Press.

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A Biden administration will tackle bipartisanship differently than Trump's, said Patrick Jones, executive director and CEO of the International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association.

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“The administration is really going to have to work very hard to build relationships and to try to carve out some issues and areas where they can work together,” Jones said. “I suspect that a Biden administration would be more relationship-based than transactional-based like we’ve seen in the Trump administration.”



“That’s the fiber of his being,” Jones said.

An infrastructure bill did not pass during the current administration, though Trump campaigned for it in 2016. Since then, the Senate Environment and Public Works committee unanimously passed a multi-year surface transportation bill in July 2019. The House passed its infrastructure bill, which was folded into the Moving Forward Act in July 2020. That bill includes a series of taxable direct-pay bonds and a restoration of tax-exempt advance refunding.

Those will both have to be reintroduced in the new Congress, which Jones hopes will happen in the first quarter of next year.

Biden’s first 100 days in office will be focused on getting COVID-19 under control, Jones said. For IBTTA, the priority remains the same despite a new president — passing a multi-year surface transportation bill.

“I’m hopeful that with whichever approach is taken that there is some renewed investment in infrastructure, that something is done to restore the Highway Trust Fund,” Jones said.

The HTF is in need of funds as it runs mostly on gas taxes while also receiving money from Treasury general funds under existing legislation. Shortfalls in the funds have been filled by transfers totaling \$144 billion since 2008, according to the Peter G. Peterson Foundation, a non-partisan research organization.

There is bipartisan support for infrastructure, said Evan Chapman, director of government relations at the American Association of Port Authorities. Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., the chair of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee has repeatedly said infrastructure is one of his top priorities.



climate change and provide millions in good-paying jobs for Americans in every sector of the economy of the United States of America,” DeFazio said in his election victory speech last week.

With the Senate in flux, it’s unknown for sure who will lead infrastructure efforts in the Senate EPW committee. Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R- W.Va., is chair of its transportation and infrastructure subcommittee, and has said infrastructure is a top priority as well, Chapman said.

Biden himself is friendly to ports and spoke at a past AAPA conference, Chapman said. Biden also visited the Port of Long Beach a few months ago.

“You take that and you take the statements from Chairman DeFazio, who is expected to continue as T&I chair and those who could lead environment and public works,” Chapman said. “It does appear that infrastructure is on the top of mind for many.”

The American Public Transportation Association continues to push for \$32 billion in a future relief bill and plans to continue to advocate for that during the lame duck session. Biden is a “tireless champion for transit,” said Chad Chitwood, spokesperson for APTA.

“We have worked very well with administrations of both parties,” Chitwood added. “We’re a very non-political, non-partisan organization. We’re looking forward to working with Biden and we expect it to be a good working relationship.”

APTA believes Biden views infrastructure as a high priority and will work to get it done.

Tuesday morning, the Senate released its draft appropriations bills, including Transportation, Housing and Urban Development. These will serve as templates for negotiations with the House to come to an omnibus appropriations bill in December, said Ward McCarragher, APTA’s vice president of government affairs and advocacy. The omnibus bill includes all 12 appropriations bill to fund the government. The Senate’s bill gives APTA an idea of lawmakers’ thinking going into next year.



legislation before then to avoid a government shutdown.

Under a new administration, transportation advocates say it's plausible for infrastructure legislation to get underway by late spring of next year.

During the Monday kickoff of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials annual virtual meeting, Ashby Johnson, a former Federal Highway Administration official who is now executive director of the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization in Austin, Texas, said he expects infrastructure legislation at the earliest in late spring of next year.

"It's going to take folks a while to get into place and kind of get settled in," Johnson said.

Sarah Wynn Reporter 



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