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OREGON'S MID-WILLAMETTE VALLEY

## DeFazio makes transportation a priority



Written by

Peter Wong

U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio said Wednesday that he has hope that Congress will move on a multi-year renewal of the national transportation program, which provides aid to states for highways and other forms of transportation.

He said the change from Democratic to Republican control of the U.S. House should not impede its prospects.

"We have 20 new Republican members on the Transportation Committee, and many of them are tea party types," DeFazio said at a meeting of the Statesman Journal editorial board. "But not a single one of them said he or she wants to cut infrastructure investment. Transportation has never managed to be a partisan issue — and I hope it won't be now."

DeFazio is in his 25th year representing southwest Oregon's 4th District. He is the No. 2 Democrat on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee — and the top-ranking Democrat on its highways and transit

subcommittee.

He said a renewal will have to be done within current revenues of about \$260 billion, less than in the previous 2003-09 program.

"With the current income, we will be doing 60 to 70 percent of what we need to do to maintain our existing infrastructure," he said. "That means it will be deteriorating at a slower rate than it is today."

He said about 150,000 bridges on national routes are substandard, and 40 percent of highway pavement is rated fair to poor.

The previous six-year federal transportation program ended in 2009. While Democrats ran the House, the committee DeFazio sits on proposed an ambitious multi-year renewal at \$500 billion. But it left open how the additional money would be raised. President Obama proposed an extension of only 18 months — and nothing resulted before the 2010 election gave Republicans a majority in the

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House.

"He's been talking about transportation for two years," DeFazio said. "I tried to move a transportation bill, and they threw out an anchor."

DeFazio voted against the 2009 federal economic-stimulus bill, saying that it contained too much for tax breaks and too little for transportation and other public works projects. "You can create real jobs, you have buy-American requirements, and they (projects) can move people and products better," he said.

On a different issue, DeFazio is renewing an alternative to the requirement in last year's health-care overhaul that every American purchase health insurance. His proposal would allow people to opt out, but to sign a waiver to preclude public medical assistance.

"I believe buying insurance should be a choice, not a matter of federal coercion," he said. "But with that choice, comes responsibility."

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