

WASHINGTON, DC –Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR), ranking member of the House Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, issued the following statement today after he was named one of the principal House negotiators of a long-term surface transportation bill that will create hundreds of thousands of private sector construction, manufacturing, engineering, and small business jobs. DeFazio is one of 21 House members (12 Republicans, 9 Democrats) named as conferees. The conference will include negotiations over a temporary one-year extension of vital county payments for Oregon counties.

DeFazio's statement is below.

“I am pleased the House has broken through its dysfunction and named conferees so we can begin to work with the Senate on long-term transportation legislation. The lack of a long-term bill is creating economic uncertainty across the country. States struggling with serious budgetary issues have already begun to delay or cancel vital transportation infrastructure projects for this construction season. Private sector construction, manufacturing, engineering, and architecture firms, and other suppliers won't hire workers for the season if we don't hammer out an agreement soon. As a conferee, I am committed to working through our differences and crafting a bipartisan solution so we can put people back to work.

“As a principal negotiator of long-term, job creating transportation legislation, I will also be fighting for the temporary extension of vital county payments for Oregon counties. A temporary extension will provide much needed breathing room for forested communities in Oregon that are on the brink of financial dissolution. Ultimately our counties and rural communities need a long term solution. I have proposed a bipartisan agreement with Rep. Walden and Rep. Schrader that can break us out of the decades-long logjam on federal forest policy, put Oregonians back to work, improve forest health, and disentangle the health of rural counties from unpredictable federal support payments. I will do everything I can to include a temporary extension of SRS in conference that would help bridge the gap until our long term strategy can be passed by Congress.”

BACKGROUND

In March, the Senate attached a one-year extension of Secure Rural Schools funding for forested counties nationwide to its two-year transportation bill (S 1813), Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21). The extension would deliver at least \$100 million in support payments for failing rural counties in Oregon. On April 18th, the House passed the Surface Transportation Extension Act of 2012, Part II (H.R. 4348). This 90-day extension of the surface transportation programs through September 30, 2012, is the legislative vehicle the House used to conference with the Senate.

This upcoming conference of the House and Senate passed bills will include negotiations over this critical lifeline to Oregon's forested communities. DeFazio will fight to include this one-year county payments reauthorization in the final bill.

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