

Today's passage of a two-year transportation funding proposal is strangely anti-climactic. We've spent three years working on a bill that will last for just two. Over the weeks to come, it will be revealed how far short of the mark the bill falls. The policies in this bill do not get us to where we need to be. There is no national vision, no national goals. It does not help bring our transportation system into the 21st century, support local communities as they try to meet the diverse needs of their members, or protect the important safeguards we have supported to protect the environment. It shortchanges bike and pedestrian programs and eliminates the Safe Routes to School program. The bill makes it more difficult for metropolitan area to have control over their transportation planning and their ability to solve problems will be undercut.

The offenses range from the serious and significant to the small and the petty. Absence of a rail title, important safety provisions, attacking environmental and community planning provisions, and the ability of metropolitan areas to guide their own future are serious flaws. Some are just inexplicably petty, like the refusal of the Republicans to allow "transit parity" to be part of the bill. Treating all commuters the same whether they take transit or drive would seem to make sense and have bipartisan support. Yet because "transit parity" was in the stimulus program and they are against the stimulus, it was rejected even though many Republicans agree that it is rational and good policy. Sadly, such is the manner in which too much of this legislation has been negotiated and presented to the House.

The good news is that the bill is not nearly as bad as my Republican colleagues wanted it to be. Guaranteed funding for transit remains, as does some limited transportation enhancement funding, albeit dramatically reduced. The streamlining of environmental provisions could have been much, much worse.

Make no mistake, I am deeply disappointed by this bill, but it is better than a system paralyzed by continued assaults on the program, attempts to starve the funding levels, and endless extensions. Two years of certainty will allow transportation departments to plan and build important projects and put people to work.

There are other positive features to this bill beyond transportation. The Secure Rural Schools funding makes a difference for Oregon and a dozen other states, helping to stabilize small, hard-hit communities. Reauthorization of the Flood Insurance Program for the first time in seven years contains many positive features. The student loan provisions will help protect thousands of students from additional increases in their student loan debt. The finance title provisions that allow a higher level of transportation funding than the House Republicans proposed are

provided in a way that will help stabilize and protect many private sector pension plans.

It's particularly ironic that our vote on the transportation bill occurred this weekend, which is the 150th anniversary of the Transcontinental Railway Act, signed by Abraham Lincoln, and that today is the anniversary of the Highway Bill signed by Eisenhower. How unfortunate is the inability or unwillingness we see today on the part of Republicans to embrace the broader vision of these two presidents from their party of how to rebuild and renew our infrastructure.