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Highway, Transit Shutdown Ends with Enactment of One-Month Extension

The Senate approved a bill Tuesday night to extend legal authority for the Highway Trust Fund for 30 days, sending the legislation to President Barack Obama, who has now signed the measure. The president's signature on [HR 4691](#) will end a shutdown of the trust fund and the furlough of 2,000 U.S. Department of Transportation employees that occurred Monday after the fund's authority to spend money expired Sunday.

[Senators approved the bill by a vote of 78-19](#) after rejecting an amendment offered by Sen. Jim Bunning, R-KY, who dropped his days-long blockade of the bill Tuesday evening in exchange for a vote on his amendment to pay for the \$10 billion bill with the closing of a tax loophole that has benefited the paper industry. The amendment failed on a budget point of order, with [43 senators voting in favor of the amendment and 53 senators voting against it](#).

Bunning had held up the Senate's consideration of the package of 30-day extensions since Thursday, arguing that the measures were not paid for. In addition to extending Highway Trust Fund authorization, the measure also extends several other provisions of law that expired Sunday including additional unemployment benefits for Americans who have run out of the standard six-month jobless payments and boosting Medicare reimbursement payments for doctors.

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood last night applauded the Senate for extending critical transportation funding.

"I am pleased that the Senate has acted to break its logjam and extend the Highway Trust Fund for another 30 days," LaHood said. "This means that our valued employees may return to work. It also means that their important work getting the economy back on its feet, ensuring Americans' safety, and keeping critical construction projects moving will be able to continue."

U.S. DOT employees who had been furloughed were instructed to return to work this morning.

"We commend the Senate for taking action last night to restore legal authority to the Highway Trust Fund so state transportation departments can again receive reimbursement from the Federal Highway Administration for projects financed with federal funds and so that U.S. DOT can put back to work the 2,000 employees who had been affected by this crisis, said John Horsley, AASHTO executive director. "It is also important to stress our desire to see the House of Representatives promptly pass a separate Senate bill that would extend Highway Trust Fund authority through the end of this year. States should not be subjected to a month-by-month renewal of federal highway and transit programs that could risk another shutdown like this in the near future. They need to have certainty to issue longer-term contracts covering the spring and summer construction seasons."

The House is expected to debate [HR 2847](#), a jobs bill amended last week by the Senate to

include a 10-month Highway Trust Fund authorization extension, \$19.5 billion in additional General Fund revenue to keep the Highway Trust Fund solvent into next year, restoration of highway funding this year to \$42 billion from a reduced level of \$30 billion, and additional federal support for states and municipalities who want to issue Build America Bonds to finance infrastructure construction.

"I am very pleased that Senator Bunning has ended his effort to block the extension of the Highway Trust Fund and transportation programs," Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chairwoman Barbara Boxer, D-CA, said last night. "This week we saw the shutdown of many important highway and bridge projects, which caused great concern in many of our states. Now I look forward to a longer-term transportation extension with the legislation that has already passed the Senate, and which I believe will pass the House this week."

Questions regarding this article may be directed to editor@ashtojournal.org.