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January 10, 2014, 02:40 pm

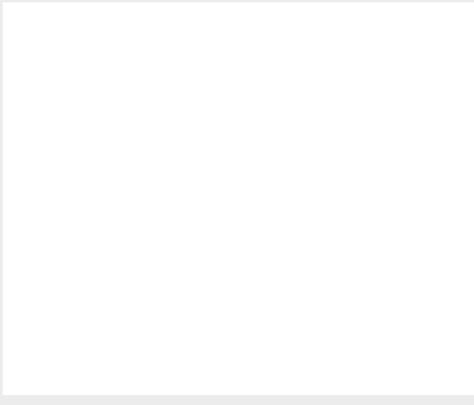
Amtrak chief declares highway trust fund 'dead'

By Keith Laing

Amtrak CEO Joe Boardman declared the Highway Trust Fund that is traditionally used to pay for federal transportation projects "dead" on Friday.

Receipts for the fund, which is filled with revenue from by the 18.4 cents per gallon federal gas tax, have been dwindling in recent years as Americans drive less often and cars become more fuel efficient.

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In a speech at the National Press Club in Washington on Friday, Boardman said it was time for lawmakers to consider other funding sources for transportation projects.

"The Highway Trust Fund is dead," Boardman said. "We need to be thinking about how to replace it with a surface transportation program for the 21st century."

The current law that authorizes transportation funding is scheduled to expire in September. The measure, which is known as the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act, contains about \$20 billion more in annual spending than the approximately \$35 billion that is brought in each year by the gas tax.

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Amtrak has traditionally received about \$1 billion from Congress since it was created in 1971, but the money is not normally included in the main transportation bill.

But Boardman said that Congress should increase the amount of money it spends on transportation further, not just find a different source for the money.

"A world-leading economy today requires a world-leading transportation system that strengthens the whole network and recognizes and supports the unique roles each mode plays in supporting interstate commerce," he said.

"If we treat the issue as 'what do we do within the existing structure,' we will all lose – nothing worthwhile will change," Boardman continued. "The questions we as Americans must answer are 'How do we redefine the approach to federal transportation investment to ensure it is focused on truly national needs? How do we recapture the national vision and purpose of the Interstate era?'"

"We are facing a real challenge, and the bankruptcy of the Highway Trust Fund is just the tip of the iceberg. It won't be easy, but if we strive in good faith, we can find a way through to a solution that will give America what it needs," Boardman concluded.

TAGS: Joe Boardman, Transportation in the United States, Highway Trust Fund, Amtrak, Fuel tax

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