

Transportation Package to Raise Revenue Through Gas Tax Hike

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Thursday February 12th, a group of bipartisan senators [presented a \\$15 billion transportation deal](#) that would finance various major projects throughout Washington mainly through an 11.7 cent/per gallon tax increase on gasoline.

Presented by the transportation Committee Chair, Sen. Joe Fain (R-Auburn) along with Sen. Curtis King (R-Yakima), Sen. Steve Hobbs (D-Lake Stevens), and Sen. Marko Liias (D-Mukilteo), the \$15 billion, 16-year plan would address outdated infrastructure, fund major and minor projects, and include a provision for Sound Transit to ask voters for an estimated \$11 billion in tax increases to expand the light rail system.

The plan, as it stands, is [estimated to raise enough funds](#) to invest in 6 large scale projects, 58 regional projects, and provide preservation and maintenance for city and county roads, the ferry system, stormwater runoff, and Washington State patrol.

The 11.7-cent tax raise would be phased in over 3 years by adding 5-cents the first year, 4.2-cents the second year, and 2.5-cents the third year. This would be added on to Washington's current 37.5-cent excise tax which is already one of the highest in the nation.

Presented by 2 democrats and 2 republicans, the plan is the strongest sign of bipartisan agreement the Washington legislature has seen on transportation initiatives in nearly two sessions. Though the camaraderie is promising, the senators will need to convince their respective caucuses to support a deal that pivots on a tax increase.

"I don't think the four of us would be standing here if we didn't feel confident that we could muster enough votes," said Sen. King said, his fellow presenters standing symbolically behind him.

In addition to convincing the caucuses, another major player to persuade is Governor Jay Inslee. Currently, the governor is pursuing a [carbon emissions cap-and-trade plan](#) that would charge businesses and industries to emit carbon over a certain amount. A provision in the transportation package would eliminate some transit funding tied into the cap-and-trade plan if the governor moves forward with it.

Though Governor Inslee considered the transportation plan a "strong start" he voiced concerns over the provision to divert transportation funds if a low carbon fuel standards plan was adopted.

The Senate Transportation Committee will begin public hearings this week and even though there are many opposition voices in the crowd, Sen. Hobbs feels it won't destroy the plan's potential for passing through the Senate and onto the House.

Hobbs said, "There are still differences, but I feel we can work some of those out."