

Group warns of funding threat to 25 transportation projects essential to Nevada



STEVE MARCUS

A view of Interstate-15, looking northbound, from a helicopter Mar 21, 2012.

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Improvements to Interstate 15, the 215 Beltway, Maryland Parkway and other road projects across the valley could be delayed due to cuts in federal highway funds, a national transportation organization said today.

A new report from TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization, identified the 25 transportation projects most important to Nevada's economy while warning about an impending cash shortfall in the federal Highway Trust Fund that could slow construction.

Will Wilkins, executive director of TRIP, said inaction in funding the trust could harm Las Vegas residents, businesses and visitors.

"When that happens the U.S. Department of Transportation is going to slow or curtail reimbursements to all the states for their road and transit projects," Wilkins said. "The states will be delaying and postponing projects like Project Neon and other projects around the country."

A confluence of factors has led to a breakpoint that requires congressional action, Wilkins said.

A \$105 billion federal program launched in 2012 to fund state projects is set to expire in September. Around the same time, the highway account of the federal Highway Trust Fund is expected to dip below \$1 billion, triggering delays in reimbursements paid out to states for construction projects.

Without congressional action, federal funding for highways could drop by nearly 100 percent Wilkins said, with Nevada standing to lose \$384 million next year.

Wilkins said any delays would lead to higher project costs and could postpone completion of needed improvements to roads and highways that are critical to the state's economy.

"It's more expensive to do these projects the longer you wait. With the economy as it is, bids are lower and there's a lot of workers ready to go to work," he said. "When the project's done, you have an asset that's helping

to provide mobility, reduce traffic accidents and really just the quality of life, you're not sitting in traffic congestion as long.'

At risk include the 25 projects listed in TRIP's report. The projects were chosen in conjunction with the Nevada Department of Transportation based on several criteria, including short-term economic benefits, job creation, improvements to access and mobility and the long-term impact on the state's economic competitiveness.

Here are the 12 projects from Southern Nevada that made the state list:

- Expand and modernize portions of I-15, including the Spaghetti Bowl
- Construction of Interstate 11 between Phoenix and Las Vegas
- Improve 215 Beltway interchange at McCarran Airport
- Redevelopment of Maryland Parkway corridor from airport to downtown Las Vegas
- Construction of eastern bypass from the I-15 and 215 Beltway northern interchange to U.S. 95
- Widen I-15 to six lanes from California state line to southern 215 Beltway
- Provide inland port facilities in Northern and Southern Nevada
- Provide passenger rail service between Los Angeles and Las Vegas
- Improve portion of Fifth Street in North Las Vegas
- Improve safety of rail-highway crossings statewide
- Improve Interstate 515 from I-15 to Horizon Drive
- Improve Elko to Las Vegas connectivity by widening portions of U.S. 93.