

Johnson City Press

Federal infrastructure bill could bring major projects, higher taxes to Georgia

By Nyamekye Daniel | The Center Square | August 6, 2021



U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg (The Center Square) – With U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg visiting Georgia on Friday to promote a federal infrastructure bill, construction workers and transit officials say it could mean major developments for the state.

Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) officials said the \$1.2 trillion U.S. Senate proposal could increase Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funding for it and other transit agencies by 65% over previous levels. The American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA) said it could help restore billions of dollars in the economic costs and millions of hours of lost time caused by the state's structurally deficient bridges.

[Critics of the bipartisan infrastructure proposal](#) believe it spends too much money and will cost Americans millions of dollars in new taxes.

"It's reckless, and it's unprecedented," U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, tweeted Friday.

The Senate proposal would make the largest federal investment in public transit and water infrastructure in history, the White House said. It makes the largest federal investment in passenger rail since Amtrak was created and invests more in bridges than when the interstate highway system was constructed.

The bill earmarks \$1.4 billion to improve public transportation across the country.

MARTA officials said the measure would streamline the eligibility and award process for around a dozen projects. The federal funding formula for transit also will increase

funding, pushing MARTA's annual amount from around \$108 million to \$140 million.

"This will allow us to leverage our local funding to improve transit for our customers, everything from increasing frequency of bus service to providing better real-time information on when that bus will arrive," MARTA Board Chair Rita Scott said.

The project eligibility for the Small Starts program would increase from \$300 million to \$400 million and the cap on the federal share would increase by \$50 million under the measure. The first two projects that could benefit from the aid are Clayton Riverdale bus rapid transit and the Campbellton Corridor, officials said.

The measure also includes \$8.9 billion to repair and rebuild highways and \$225 million for bridge replacement and repairs nationwide.

According to the ARTBA, 374 Georgia bridges are in poor condition or worse. Georgia's interstate congestion and vehicle travel rate are among the highest in the U.S., a recent report by the National Transportation Research Group (TRIP) showed.

TRIP found that 57% of urban interstate highways in Georgia are considered congested during peak hours, the 12th-highest in the U.S. Georgia also has the 13th-highest rate of daily interstate travel per urban lane-mile.

ARTBA Chief Economist Alison Premo Black said freight bottlenecks have cost Georgia almost \$1.7 billion and nearly 26 million hours of lost time.

Buttigieg is President Joe Biden's third Cabinet member to visit the state this week to lobby for the infrastructure plan. Democrats also have touted the potential of job growth and expansion of internet access from the bill, but Cruz said the bill could hurt the manufacturing industry and taxpayers.

Cruz said the bill would implement a tax on 42 chemicals used in manufacturing and could increase the cost of raw materials. He said the bill is part of Democrats' broader spending agenda.

"The Democrats have made it clear that they're going to pass this infrastructure bill, take every penny of the spending, and then turn around and try to ram through their massive \$3.5 trillion tax and spend bill right on top of this, which means we're looking at about \$5 trillion of spending in just those two bills," Cruz said. "That means trillions of dollars in new taxes."