

Missouri could receive more than \$8B under federal infrastructure package

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Senate Rules and Administration Committee chairman Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., listens to testimony, Wednesday, July 22, 2020, about elections, on Capitol Hill in Washington. AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin

(The Center Square) – Missouri will receive \$6.5 billion for highways and \$484 million for bridges as part of the five-year \$1.2 trillion federal Infrastructure bill approved by the U.S. Senate Tuesday in a 69-30 vote.

The Democratic-controlled U.S. House still has to approve the spending bill.

Missouri's GOP senators split, with senior U.S. Sen. Roy Blunt, retiring in 2022, joining 18 Republicans in voting 'yes' and junior U.S. Sen. Josh Hawley voting 'no.'

"As a national transportation hub, Missouri is among the states that will benefit the most from the targeted investments in this bipartisan infrastructure bill," Blunt said. "The bill authorizes more than \$8 billion to help our state improve the safety and reliability of our roads and highways. It includes much-needed funding for ports and waterways. And, it focuses resources toward ending the digital divide that has left nearly one-third of rural Missourians without access to broadband.

"The investments in this bill," he continued, "will help us maintain that advantage and improve the quality of life for families, businesses, and farmers."

Hawley called the bill "pork spending" and "woke politics" on Twitter, linking to an Aug. 4

Wall Street Journal editorial calling the package a "major down payment on President Biden's Green New Deal."

Hawley told KRCG 13 News in Springfield he "didn't know" why Blunt voted for it and how the package would benefit Missouri, especially since Congressional Democrats may adopt an additional \$3.5 billion spending proposal.

"I don't know in what form this thing will actually get passed. (House Speaker) Nancy Pelosi has indicated she may not take it up," he said.

Under the bill, Missouri could also tap into a \$12.5 billion Bridge Investment Program and a \$16 billion fund for economic development projects.

The federal infrastructure investment comes after the Missouri General Assembly's 2021 adoption of Senate Bill 262, which raises the Motor Fuels Tax (MFT) from 17 cents a gallon to 29 cents a gallon by 2026 to generate an additional \$513 million for roads, according to the state's Department of Revenue (DOR).

Missouri's 33,800 miles of roads is the nation's seventh-largest road network, but the state's transportation funding, before adoption of SB 262, ranked 45th of 50 states, according to transportation research nonprofit TRIP.

In a December 2020 report, TRIP said 52% of Missouri roads are in "poor or mediocre condition," costing state drivers an estimated \$8 billion annually in lost productivity, higher operating costs, increased insurance rates.

"I believe infrastructure is one of the most critical things you can invest in, from roads and bridges to broadband," SB 262 sponsor Senate President Pro Tem Dave Schatz, R-Sullivan, told reporters. "We're not sure what the stuff is in the bill where we might have to hold our nose, but these investments would be phenomenal for Missouri because we're going to need it to continue pushing Missouri forward."

Under the bill, the state's public transportation system could receive more than \$670 million over the next five years. One-third of Missouri's public transit vehicles are beyond "useful lifespans," forcing commuters to spend an extra 80% in commuting times, according to the White House.

Under the bill, Missouri is also eligible for a minimum of \$100 million to improve broadband infrastructure that could provide access to more than 330,000 residents.

"I'm encouraged by the interest in broadband and that investment. The federal government has been quick to clarify its requirements and move deadlines when asked, and this investment shows we all have a dog in this fight," Interim Committee on Broadband Development Chair Rep. Louis Riggs, R-Hannibal, said.

"The real challenge," he said, "is to implement the funds and figure out how to use them to best serve Missourians once we have it."