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April 27, 2012

**LAWMAKERS CALL FOR REMOVAL OF RAIL PROVISION DURING HIGHWAY BILL CONFERENCE COMMITTEE SCHEDULES FIRST MEETING**

By Keith Laing  
The Hill  
April 26, 2012

The panel of lawmakers tapped to hammer out an agreement on a new federal transportation bill will hold its first meeting next month, a key member of the committee said Thursday.

Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) said the transportation conference committee would meet Tuesday, May 8. Boxer, who is chairwoman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, shepherded the Senate's two-year, \$109 billion transportation bill through the upper chamber earlier this year.

Boxer said she is eager to begin negotiations on the bill with the House, though the lower chamber has only passed a pair of temporary extensions of current highway funding through Sept. 30.

"I am sure that every member of the conference, Democrat or Republican, House or Senate, understands how critical it is to swiftly pass a comprehensive transportation bill that is a deficit neutral, reform measure that will preserve or create millions of jobs and thousands of businesses," Boxer said in a statement released by her office.

"Now is the time to set aside our personal wish lists and focus on the issue at hand – the reauthorization of a bill that is absolutely essential to our economy," she continued. "Controversy should not be part of the conference and we should come together for the good of the country."

Boxer is one of 14 senators who were appointed to the conference committee this week. She will be joined by Sens. Max Baucus (D-Mont.), Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), Tim Johnson (D-S.D.), Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), Robert Menendez (D-N.J.), James Inhofe (R-Okla.), David Vitter (R-La.), Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), Richard Shelby (R-Ala.), Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas), Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.) and John Hoeven (R-N.D.).

The House has appointed 33 lawmakers to the highway bill conference committee, including Republican Reps. John Mica (Fla.), Don Young (Alaska), John Duncan (Tenn.), Bill Shuster (Pa.), Shelley Moore Capito (W-Va.), Rick Crawford (Ark.), Jaime Herrera Beutler (Wash.), Larry Bucshon (Ind.), Richard Hanna (N.Y.), Steve Southerland (Fla.), James Lankford (Okla.), Reid Ribble (Wis.), Fred Upton (Mich.), Ed Whitfield (Ky.), Doc Hastings (Wash.), Rob Bishop (Utah), Ralph Hall (Texas), Chip Cravaack (Minn.), Dave Camp (Mich.) and Patrick Tiberi (Ohio).

Those GOP members of the transportation conference committee will be joined by 13 House Democrats: Reps. Nick Rahall (W.Va.), Peter DeFazio (Ore.), Jerry Costello (Ill.), Jerrold Nadler (N.Y.), Corrine Brown (Fla.), Elijah Cummings (Md.), Leonard Boswell (Iowa), Tim Bishop (N.Y.), Henry Waxman (Calif.), Ed Markey (Mass.), Eddie Bernice Johnson (Texas), Earl Blumenauer (Ore.) and Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D.C.).

*Originally published here: <http://thehill.com/blogs/transportation-report/highways-bridges-and-roads/223981-highway-bill-conference-committee-schedules-first-meeting>*

## **LAWMAKERS CALL FOR REMOVAL OF RAIL PROVISION DURING HIGHWAY BILL CONFERENCE**

By Keith Laing  
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A bipartisan pair of lawmakers is calling for the panel of lawmakers tapped to negotiate an agreement on a new federal transportation bill to remove a provision dealing with high-speed rail from the Senate's version of the measure.

Reps. Doris Matsui (D-Calif.) and Randy Hultgren (R-Ill.) said Thursday that lawmakers should remove a provision in the \$109 billion transportation bill that was approved by the Senate earlier this year that allows federal funds to be spent on train locomotives that are only capable of running at 110 miles-per-hour.

Instead, the lawmakers said, the version of the transportation bill that emerges from the conference committee -- if one does emerge -- should raise the limit to 125 miles-per-hour.

"Maintaining the speed of 125 mph ensures that America's passenger railroad system will be more modern, efficient and attractive to riders," the lawmakers wrote in a letter to the conference committee. "Faster passenger trains mean less travel time, and less travel time increases both ridership and revenue. Moreover, diesel-electric locomotives designed for 125 mph use less fuel, and impose less wear-and-tear on train tracks, train-wheels and switches."

The Senate's version of the transportation bill (S. 1813) would provide funding for road and transit projects over the next two years. The bill was amended to lower the requirement for high-speed rail locomotives after a federal panel recommended 125 miles-per-hour.

Supporters of lowering the speed of the locomotives argued that the faster trains may not be compatible with existing tracks, but Matsui and Hultgren argued that was not a valid concern.

"The most utilized and profitable passenger railroad lines in the U.S. can already support trains traveling at 125 mph, and there is an ongoing effort in the U.S. to upgrade more tracks to support 125 mph," the lawmakers wrote. "As we strive to build a world-class rail system, we need to increase performance and efficiency, while reducing emissions and addressing other environmental factors.

"Locomotives last in service for at least 25 years, so procuring 110 mph locomotives now would lock America's passenger railroad network out of faster, more popular and more efficient service for a generation."

*Originally published here: <http://thehill.com/blogs/transportation-report/railroads/224093-lawmakers-call-for-removal-of-rail-provision-during-highway-bill-conference>*