



## Focus on FAA Reauthorization, Not Infrastructure: Groups to Trump

- **Trump administration should narrow infrastructure goals to FAA reauthorization this year, groups say**
- **Top Republicans have indicated Trump's plan for a \$1 trillion infrastructure investment could be put on back burner**

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(BNA) -- The Trump administration should work with lawmakers to enact an FAA reauthorization that would privatize air traffic control instead of trying to sway congressional Republicans to get behind a vaguely defined infrastructure investment plan, several transportation policy analysts said.

They said reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration seemed like a more obvious issue for the administration to tackle in its early days than a nonspecific \$1 trillion infrastructure package that could include anything from local transit to telecommunications and energy.

“You can see in Trump this confusion about what is infrastructure. What is properly federal? What is properly state, local and private?” Chris Edwards, the Cato Institute's tax policy director, said during a Jan. 27 event hosted by the Heritage Foundation. “And the plan put together by two of his advisers last fall that would provide tax credits for, I guess, private investment reflects that sort of confusion. They were not specific in their plan on what they're talking about.”

### ***Republicans Move Goal Line***

If President Donald Trump's infrastructure proposal focuses too much on roads, bridges and transit, then it's unlikely to go anywhere with this Congress, Edwards said. He noted that after the enactment of a five-year reauthorization of federal highway and transit programs in 2015, there was little appetite among lawmakers for passing similar legislation so soon.

Trump vowed on the campaign trail to unveil an infrastructure proposal within the first 100 days of his presidency. But even if that happens early in the 100-day period, House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) has indicated the proposal would not make the House's legislative agenda until the spring. And the size of the package will be determined by how much “fiscal space” is in the House's spring budget, Ryan said recently.

Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee Chairman John Thune (R-S.D.) also conveyed some uncertainty about when or if Congress might take up an infrastructure package.

“As I see it right now, we have a very focused agenda, things that we want to get done in the next 200 days and how infrastructure plays into that, we're not sure yet,” Thune said at a Republican retreat in Philadelphia on Jan. 25.

### ***FAA Bill Lighter Lift***

In addition to Edwards from the Cato Institute, representatives from the Eno Center for Transportation and Competitive Enterprise said at the Jan. 27 event that the new administration should focus on reauthorizing the FAA first. The FAA's current spending authority expires on Sept. 30. And given Trump's focus on encouraging more public-private partnerships, it would make sense to focus on passing reauthorization legislation that would privatize the air traffic control system, the groups' representatives said.

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee approved a Republican-backed bill last year that would have removed the air traffic control system from the FAA and created a new nonprofit corporation run by air space users.

The House bill's path to the floor was blocked by opposition from Democrats as well as tax writers and appropriators from both sides of the aisle. A slew of senators, including Commerce ranking member Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), also raised objections.

However, the proposal has been supported by a range of industry lobby groups, including Airlines for America and the National Air Traffic Controllers Association. And House T&I Chairman Bill Shuster (R-Pa.) has said he plans to reintroduce the bill this year.

“There's a proposal that's on the table. That's really something we should be able to address, I think, very, very quickly,” Eno Center President and CEO Robert Puentes said. “We'd have enormous transformations. And probably the biggest change we've seen in aviation in a generation.”

### ***Playing to Chao's Strengths***

Transportation Secretary-designate Elaine Chao has yet to take a position on the air traffic control spinoff plan, though she is expected to be especially influential in shaping the bill due to her aviation background. Chao helped shepherd through an FAA reauthorization in 1990 while deputy transportation secretary under President George H.W. Bush. She was also a member of the Northwest Airlines board of directors prior to the company's acquisition by Delta Air Lines.

Chao's nomination is to get a Senate vote on Jan. 31.