

Idaho House panel to consider last-ditch roads funding plan

By RYAN STRUYK, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Two House Republicans say they have a last-minute proposal to raise \$70 million to \$100 million per year in new transportation funding.

The House Transportation and Defense Committee is slated to consider the eleventh-hour proposal Tuesday. The plan would draw from overall tax revenue growth and a temporary five-cent fuel tax increase to tackle the state's \$262 million annual transportation shortfall.

Reps. Jason Monks from Meridian and Greg Chaney from Caldwell say they are optimistic the bill strikes a compromise between legislators split on using general funds on transportation maintenance.

The plan comes as Republican leadership is pushing the Idaho Legislature to adjourn by March 27.

"Holding out for the perfect bill is going to leave us with nothing, I fear," Chaney said. "The fact of the matter is we've been in the discussion phase long enough."

If Idaho's general fund revenue increases by 4 percent or more in a year, the plan would designate four-tenths of a percent to road funding — roughly \$12 million, according to Monks. As that money cumulates annually, the five-cent per gallon gas tax would gradually decrease, Monks said.

The plan also includes a registration fee hike for hybrid and electric cars, as well as a two-cent transfer fee increase.

"There could always be more changes, especially when you are talking about the Senate," Chaney said. "But it's time to move the process along."

Legislators have been searching for transportation funding since 2010, when a task force unveiled a \$262 million annual shortfall for road maintenance and an additional \$281 million shortfall for necessary improvements.

However, House Majority Caucus Chair Rep. John Vander Woude says GOP House leadership is working on a separate last-minute effort. He says his plan would raise fuel taxes and registration fees to collect roughly \$100 million.

"It's now or never," Vander Woude said. "We need to put something together and get it rolling."