

Idaho House weighs 3 last-minute roads funding bills

By RYAN STRUYK, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — House lawmakers are courting three last-minute proposals promising to fund Idaho's transportation shortfall as the legislative session inches closer to its expected March 27 end-date.

Still, none of the bills so far would come close to addressing the state's entire \$262 million annual shortfall, which has been clear to legislators since 2010.

An additional \$281 million is needed each year for improvements.

Rep. Joe Palmer, who chairs the House Transportation and Defense Committee, has said he doesn't think a comprehensive transportation bill will pass this year.

But House Speaker Scott Bedke told the Associated Press on Monday he believes the right eleventh-hour bill could still become law.

— GENERAL FUND AND TEMPORARY FUEL TAX HIKE

The House Transportation and Defense Committee introduced a plan Tuesday to use a combination of general fund growth and a temporary 5-cent fuel tax increase to reach \$70 million to \$100 million per year.

Republican Reps. Jason Monks and Greg Chaney say their bill is a compromise between legislators who oppose tax increases and those who oppose using general fund dollars.

Still, lawmakers raised concerns with both the tax hikes and general fund use on Tuesday — as well as the bill's failure to address more of the shortfall.

— ONE YEAR GENERAL FUND SACRIFICE

Republican Rep. Steven Harris is pushing a plan that would designate \$120 million from next year's general fund growth as dedicated transportation funding.

Harris says the legislature wouldn't do anything but vital increases next session in order to give most of the new money to roads.

"What would happen if we did a one year sacrifice next year and didn't do anything else — 2017, the year for transportation," Harris said.

The House Transportation and Defense Committee introduced the plan Tuesday, but Democrats raised concerns over taking away funding from education and other areas.

— FUEL TAX AND REGISTRATION FEE HIKE

Republican legislative leaders are expected to reveal legislation on Wednesday that would rely solely on higher fuel taxes and registration fees to raise roughly \$100 million for transportation.

The House Ways and Means Committee is slated to consider the plan on Wednesday.

More details will emerge with the introduction of the bill.

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