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Senate Democrats Challenge Trump with Their Own \$1T Infrastructure Plan.

DALLAS — Senate Democrats have countered President Trump with their own 10-year, \$1 trillion infrastructure package that calls for more direct federal funding rather than incentives for private investments.

The proposal outlined Tuesday by Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., would provide \$210 billion for roads and bridges, \$180 billion for rail and bus systems, \$110 billion for water projects, \$75 billion for schools, \$65 billion for ports and airports, \$20 billion for projects in national parks and tribal lands, \$20 billion for expanding wireless broadband service, and \$10 billion for Veterans Affairs hospitals.

It would expand the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant program by \$10 billion and provide major increases in clean water and drinking water state revolving funds.

The proposal also includes a \$200 billion Vital Infrastructure Projects (VIP) program that will direct major federal investments to the most critical national projects.

“It’s a challenge to the president,” Schumer said in an online interview with USA Today. “We’re challenging the president — he talked about in his campaign — to join with us. If he does, we’ll work with him on this.”

Trump’s 10-year plan unveiled by his campaign in late October relies on \$137 billion of federal tax incentives to leverage private investments in revenue-producing projects.

Public-private partnerships are the wrong approach in most cases, Schumer said.

“Some people have talked about doing this as a tax break for wealthy people. We don’t believe that works,” he said.

“We would pay for it out of the Treasury,” Schumer said. “It’s a stimulus program. We need more and better-paying jobs.”

The Democrats’ proposal would create 15 million jobs, he said.

Democrats will discuss and negotiate with President Trump about how to pay for the infrastructure plan, Schumer said.

“There will be no cuts to education or healthcare programs,” Schumer said. “Are the tax cuts for the rich going to be paid for?” he asked, adding, “I doubt it.”

Trump’s infrastructure program will likely be funded through an overhaul of the federal tax code that Democrats could support, according to Rep. Bill Shuster, R-Pa., chairman of the House

Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

“The bitter pill for Democrats is tax reform,” Shuster said at a Tuesday event sponsored by the Republican Main Street Coalition. “But the sweet chaser is infrastructure dollars. So I think they’re willing to go along if they’re finding those dollars.”

Trump would need Democratic support to pass an infrastructure program, Schuster said.

“We Democrats have always been behind this but we’ve been stymied by Republicans in the Senate over and over again,” Schumer said. President Trump “is going to have to work with us. To get this done, Trump may have to break with those doctrinaire people who are out of touch with what Republicans and Democrats in America have always supported: The federal government should assist in building roads and bridges and tunnels.”

Sponsors of the infrastructure legislation include Schumer and Sens. Thomas Carper from Delaware, Bill Nelson from Florida, Ron Wyden from Oregon, Sherrod Brown from Ohio, Bernie Sanders and Patrick Leahy from Vermont, and Maria Cantwell from Washington.

“Senate Democrats have unveiled this blueprint because we need a wide-sweeping infrastructure plan, and we need it now,” Schumer said.

Trump’s infrastructure plan may face resistance from congressional Republicans who are concerned about how to pay for it, said Richard LeFrak, a New York developer appointed by the president to a panel that will oversee it.

Trump “has to come up with a financing plan, and I think there’s going to be a little bit of a tug of war between the conservatives in the Republican party who are concerned about deficits and the president who’s concerned about jobs,” he said Monday on CNBC. “I think [Trump] he will prevail, ultimately, because he wants to put people to work.”

Trump supports a \$1 trillion plan but the final price tag may be lower, LeFrak said. “He’d like it to start with a “t,” but I think the number I’ve heard tossed around is about \$550 billion,” LeFrak said.

The Bond Buyer

By Jim Watts

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