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Band-Aid approach to infrastructure can't continue, U.S. transportation chief says in Pittsburgh

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Carnegie Mellon University Assistant Professor Srinivasa Narasimhan (left) shows Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx smart headlights during a tour of the National Robotics Engineering Center in Lawrenceville on Wednesday afternoon, April 22, 2015.



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By Melissa Daniels

Wednesday, April 22, 2015, 10:42 p.m.

Lawmakers in Washington tend to define success "as last year's budget number," said Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx during a visit Wednesday to Pittsburgh.

This, he said, is not enough to repair and improve the nation's aging infrastructure.

"Congress has used a variety of duct tape and chewing gum over these six years to patch together additional money just to keep the levels stable, but that says nothing about what the country actually needs," he said.

Foxx discussed federal transportation plans at Carnegie Mellon University's National Robotics Engineering Center in Lawrenceville. Federal funding has relied on 32 short-term plans in the past six years. Funding expires May 31.

Foxx outlined pressing needs, such as an \$86 billion backlog in transit investment. He cited "some breakthroughs" with this session of Congress, which has a newly fortified Senate Republican majority, but said consensus on transportation remains an enigma.

"It's going to take bipartisan support, it's going to take working together, and that's been difficult over the last several years," he said. "From a transportation standpoint, the jury's still out in many ways because a lot of our issues are coming up."

During the visit, Foxx met with students, studied the facility's

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road and vehicle robotics projects, and promoted his department's Beyond Traffic study, a 30-year plan that emphasizes the need for technology in infrastructure.

Herman Herman, director of the robotics center, called Foxx's visit "an excellent opportunity to showcase the technology that we've been working on," such as autonomous vehicles. The center showed off headlight technology designed to improve visibility, and traffic signals that respond to congestion.

The Obama administration has proposed a six-year, \$478 billion plan that increases overall transportation funding by 50 percent. Most of the increase is propped up by a proposed 14 percent tax on corporate profits kept overseas.

Foxx said he thinks congressional action will come down to pressure from the public, which is fed up with spending money on vehicle repairs caused by bad roads.

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