

Rail funding fight set to begin rolling in House

By Keith Laing - 06/20/13 05:04 PM ET

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee will hold a hearing next week to begin considering a new Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA).

The current PRIIA bill, which authorizes funding for Amtrak, among other things, is set to expire in September.

Lawmakers in both parties have identified extending the rail funding bill a priority for 2013, and jockeying has already begun between supporters and opponents of long-distance railways like Amtrak.

The House Transportation Committee's Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials subcommittee will hold a hearing on June 27 to begin consideration of the new rail bill.

The last PRIIA bill was passed in 2008. The measure was signed into law by former President George W. Bush shortly before the election of President Obama.

The subject of funding for long-distance railways has since become intensely political, with Republicans opposing Obama's efforts to use money from the 2009 economic stimulus package to begin creating a nationwide network of railways.

Obama said the rail network could eventually rival the interstate highway system, but Republicans argued that it would cost too much to build and not be used by enough passengers to pay for its operations.

The chairman of the House rail panel, Rep. Jeff Denham (R-Calif.), has vocally opposed a planned high-speed railway in California, which received more money than other states from the Department of Transportation (DOT) under Obama.

Denham has argued that supporters of the controversial California have inflated ridership numbers and understated the costs of constructing the railway.

The Transportation Committee said Thursday that "the next rail reauthorization will be to build upon PRIIA's successes and address areas in which the previous bill fell short."

Read more: <http://thehill.com/blogs/transportation-report/railroads/306939-rail-funding-fight-set-to-begin-rolling-in-house-#ixzz2WsYWrtHw>

Follow us: [@thehill on Twitter](#) | [TheHill on Facebook](#)