

"Five years ago, if negotiators looked at the top line of what the states were getting, what's changed to make that deal different?" said Randy Blankenhorn, executive director of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. "It's great they give us \$100 million for Create, but to turn around and take \$120 million away is a net loss."

Illinois currently ranks fifth-worst in the U.S. for its return on federal highway funding, getting back only 92 cents on every dollar it sends to Washington, D.C., according to a CMAP spokesman. That eight-cent gap costs the state almost 40,000 jobs.

Mr. Oberstar's formula approach would reduce the amount Illinois is currently slated to get by about \$119 million, or about 8% of the state's federal highway funding this year.

"There has never been a final congressional decision that Illinois should receive this \$119 million," Mr. Oberstar wrote in a letter to Mr. Durbin on April 12, after Mr. Durbin asked Mr. Oberstar in a letter to back off and stop adding his formula fix to other House-passed transportation bills that the Senate must pass, such as funding for the Federal Aviation Administration.

Mr. Oberstar noted that he went along with the Senate's latest short-term highway extension only after Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., promised him in writing "that there would be legislation passed by the Senate in the next few weeks to allocate these funds by the House methodology."

"We took Reid at his word. We thought he had his lieutenants in line," said a spokesman for the House Transportation Committee. "That wasn't the case. Now we're facing off with Durbin."



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However, legislation to renew soon-to-expire FAA funding until July 3 is coming up in the House next week, and "most likely it won't have highway language in it," he added, knowing that the Senate would reject it. Doing the same thing and expecting different results is "the definition of insanity. We will have to deal with that and deal with highways separately."

Meanwhile, the Illinois Department of Transportation isn't planning to spend the \$119 million until its fate is assured, a spokeswoman said.

But that might not be clear until much later this year.

"That means we miss a construction season for \$120 million. That's not a good solution," Mr. Blankenhorn said. "From our perspective, it is real money that we think we should be getting out of a national transportation pot."

It's unclear whether Mr. Oberstar will prevail, even though he has most states and Mr. Reid on his side.

"At some point, the Senate leadership will need the chairman's help on something," the transportation panel's spokesman said. Coming from upper Minnesota, he added, Mr. Oberstar has what's called "iron-range Alzheimer's: You only remember those who've done you wrong, and he plans to be around for a while."

Mr. Durbin, with a chuckle, acknowledged as much: "I'm sure he'll remind me. He has a long memory. He's also a realist: He knows I'm going to fight for my state the way he fights for his."



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