

The House will move as early as next week on a jobs bill anchored by at least \$75 billion in spending on infrastructure, according to House Democrats.

"We're moving on jobs," Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), a chief deputy whip, said following a Tuesday afternoon Democratic Caucus meeting.

At the briefing, members were told that leaders intend on passing a jobs package of between \$75 billion and \$150 billion before adjourning for the year.

A package consisting of highway, road and bridge construction funding; additional aid for unemployed workers; direct financial assistance to states; and the possibility of other items ranging from small-business tax credits to billions of dollars in home weatherization tax rebates could be on the floor as early as next week, according to multiple Democrats.

Both dollar figures and a final lineup of projects remained elusive on Tuesday.

In order to pass a bill by the end of the year, the House would have to forgo committee markups.

But both Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Jim Oberstar (D-Minn.) and Highways and Transit subcommittee Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) — who has complained about the shunning of the legislative process — signaled they don't have an issue with leadership's plans.

Democrats have spent weeks discussing the merits of billions in new funding for highway infrastructure projects, but had not reached an agreement on how much to spend or what other measures should be included in a major job-creating bill.

Minutes before their Tuesday caucus meeting, Democratic leaders were publicly hedging on whether they could squeeze a major jobs bill into the remaining eight or so workdays left on the House calendar. Adjournment is scheduled for Dec. 18.

In addition, Democrats said they wanted to secure a commitment from the Senate — which is bogged down in healthcare reform, and likely to remain so right up until Christmas — to follow suit this year.

“There is a great desire to get it done over on the House side,” Assistant to the Speaker Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) said before the meeting. “But we just have to get a sense of where the Senate is first.”

[By Jared Allen, The Hill](#)

“The complication right now is that the Senate is very focused on the healthcare bill,” House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) said Tuesday morning. “I don’t mean they can’t walk and chew gum at the same time. They can ... But they’re not going to have floor time to do anything else.

But the message House leaders took into their caucus meeting a short time later was quite different.

DeFazio said that members were told that road and bridge construction was going to be a “very big portion” of the bill they’re aiming to put forward next week.

Beyond infrastructure, it remained unclear what else will be included.

President Barack Obama’s endorsement Tuesday of a program to dole out tax rebates for homeowners who weatherize their homes offered what program sponsor Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) called a “big shot in the arm.”

"This is a very practical and efficient way to create jobs immediately," Welch said. At the same time, Welch said he still didn't know if House leaders would include any or all of the \$20 billion, two-year program in their jobs bill.

And Democrats may not know until close to the last minute.

Rep. Jim Cooper (D-Tenn.), an influential voice among the conservative Blue Dog Coalition, said a "modest" investment in infrastructure along the lines of the \$75 billion would be entirely appropriate, especially if it's paid for with unused funds originally earmarked for the nation's banks.

Asked if that meant support for the jobs bill, Cooper said: "Well, we'll have to see what gets tacked onto it."

One thing that seemed clear to all, though, was the decision to act with or without the Senate in tow.

House and Senate Democrats huddled late in the afternoon to discuss plans and timing for a new jobs bill above and beyond must-pass measures such as unemployment insurance extensions and COBRA health insurance extensions.

Leaving his caucus meeting, DeFazio said the message that House Democratic leaders gave to their rank-and-file members was clear.

"The Senate is on their own time schedule and we're going to give them an opportunity to do something meaningful about jobs before the first of the year," DeFazio said. "If they pass on that opportunity, then that would be unfortunate."