



Minnesotans understand how important it is to have safe and effective roads and bridges. Our state's economic growth and ability to provide a quality education and health care services depends on moving people and products. That's why Minnesota voters have voted numerous times to constitutionally dedicate transportation user fees to fixing roads and bridges. And, according to our recent poll, over three-quarters of Minnesotans would vote to do so again.

This is hardly new. Minnesota's Constitution contains an entire article on highway funding because it is so important to have reliable funding when building major highway and bridge projects. Dedicating motor vehicle fees, like the sales tax on auto parts, in addition to the gas tax and license tab fees just makes sense. It ensures that those who use the roads the most pay for them.

Legislation is currently moving through the process – authored by House Transportation Committee Chair Paul Torkelson and Senate Transportation Committee Chair Scott Newman - that would allow voters to decide in November if all of the revenue generated through the sales tax on auto repair parts should be used for road and bridge repair. The dedication of these funds would be phased in to mitigate the impact on the general fund. Some funding would be directed to smaller cities – those with a population below 5,000 who do not receive a direct allocation currently from the Highway Trust Fund. The funding would be distributed statewide for repair of state trunk highways, county state aid highways and city and township roads.

The bottom line is this: how much of a priority is a well-maintained, modern transportation system for Minnesota? With deteriorating roads and bridges, it's time to devote a small portion (0.6%) of the state's budget to fixing transportation infrastructure – especially now, during a time of budget surplus, when the state has the flexibility to begin the redirection of these funds without triggering cuts to other spending priorities.

The fact is that an increase in the gas tax simply isn't in the cards at the state Capitol right now. In fact, it almost never is. Legislators have voted to increase Minnesota's gas tax exactly once since 1989, and that took a veto override. There is simply no appetite at the Legislature to raise the gas tax to fund much needed improvements in our transportation system. And yet, the need for additional investment continues to grow.

We have a choice. We can sit back and wait another decade or two for our deteriorating infrastructure to reach a crisis point, with the hope that such conditions will lead to an increase in the gas tax. Or we can make some progress today by using the state's favorable budget situation to bring much needed transportation-related dollars into the transportation system now to help fix our roads and bridges. This will benefit all Minnesotans by improving safety and reducing congestion on our roads, creating and sustaining good jobs in the construction industry, and ensuring Minnesota businesses and farmers have ready access to local, regional, and global marketplaces for goods, customers and talent.

A growing and united coalition of organizations is supporting this increased investment in our state's roads and bridges including businesses, labor, local governments, agricultural interests and others. Protecting transportation dollars for years to come will provide the stability the state needs to pay

back trunk highway bonds and to maintain and improve critical highways and bridges around the state.

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