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McCoy: Report says to increase road funds to prevent loss of opportunities

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The recent collapse of the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis is a stark reminder of the importance of strong infrastructure to public safety and the vitality of our communities.

In Iowa, we have nearly 25,000 bridges that traverse our rivers, streams and public roadways. While our bridges and roads may be safe to drive, many are in need of major repair or replacement. This is an issue I've been addressing as chairman of the Legislature's Transportation Infrastructure Budget Subcommittee.

Following the tragedy in Minneapolis, Gov. Chet Culver ordered an immediate review of recent Iowa bridge inspections and a report on their overall safety. In addition, he requested that the Iowa Department of Transportation identify any bridges in Iowa that are similar in design to the Minneapolis bridge and immediately perform a follow-up inspection of those bridges.

This comes at a time when the state is already looking for ways to pay for projected shortfalls in road and bridge funding. Last year, IDOT conducted a study called TIME-21 (Transportation Investment Moves the Economy in the 21st Century). TIME-21 showed there will be a \$27.7 billion shortfall over the next 20 years to maintain, preserve and build new roads and bridges.

This shortfall is due to a leveling off of federal funds, a smaller increase in road use tax revenue, and an increase in the cost of concrete and other construction materials.

According to the TIME-21 report, with no additional revenue for the public roadway system, Iowans can expect a dramatic decrease in road and bridge conditions in the coming years. In addition, congestion in and around urban areas and along interstates will increase significantly.

To prevent a loss of economic development opportunities to other states and to keep Iowans safe on our roads, the TIME-21 report calls for at least \$200 million per year in new revenue to be deposited into a special fund that will be divided among cities, counties and the state.

Some experts have suggested that new revenue could come from an increase in existing

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sources, including fuel taxes, motor vehicle registration fees, use tax on motor vehicles, and driver's license fees, some of which haven't seen an increase in a decade or longer. Other potential sources include sales tax on the cost of fuel purchases, a severance tax on ethanol exported from Iowa, a per-mile tax based on vehicle travel within the state, and a transportation improvement district tax.

This fall, a bipartisan committee will thoroughly review the TIME-21 report. I look forward to the committee's recommendations, which are due to the Legislature by January 2008, and to finding long-term solutions for maintaining and improving our roads.

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