



## Road work well-targeted, but it needs more funding

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We are not asleep at the wheel here in Iowa.

During the last legislative session in Des Moines, large majorities of both houses of the Iowa Legislature enacted legislation that will more strategically target future fuel taxes and fees on the roads and bridges that carry the lion's share of our people and our commerce. While the future cannot be predicted, using your tax dollars more effectively can only make it less likely that a tragedy like the Minneapolis bridge collapse will happen here.

Highway funding battles at the Statehouse represent the classic "rural vs. urban" standoff in Iowa that often prevents progress on important issues. State, county and city officials all have charts showing increased travel, aging bridges and a shortage of tax dollars to address the issues. The credit here goes to legislative leaders, legislators and other opinion makers who corralled all the highway groups and interested parties and emerged with a vision targeting key routes on both rural and urban systems to support our future economy.

The passage and signing into law of this bill represents, in an important way, the kind of political compromise and progress we would like to expect from our elected leaders in Iowa. The 92 votes in the House and 42 "ayes" in the Iowa Senate are the type of triumph of statesmanship over parochialism that we need in Iowa to move forward.

In simple terms, the bill concentrates the bulk of any new fuel taxes and registration fees on our most strategic and heavily used streets, bridges and highways. Our primary highway system, which includes the commercial and industrial network, will now receive 60 percent of new funding, up from 47.5 percent. With more than 75 percent of Iowa's modern truck traffic concentrated on just 3 percent of our roads and bridges, the increased targeted funding is an important recognition of how the patterns of commerce and population have changed in Iowa.

Legislators also zeroed in on specific growth industries for additional funding, providing that a priority be given to projects in areas of the state that have existing biodiesel, ethanol or other biorefineries. For the funding dedicated for county roads, lawmakers inserted a requirement that at least 10 percent of new money be prioritized for projects that aid economic development and job creation.

In Iowa, truck transportation is the mode of choice, moving more than 70 percent of our manufactured goods. Virtually all agricultural products make part of their journey to market over Iowa's highway system. Jobs depend on the trucking industry's ability to insure that raw materials make it to the factory and that our finished products get to

market. For motorists, much of the increase in automobile traffic is on the same targeted highway systems.

Current projections indicate that Iowa's interstate system will soon be stretched to its limits with increasing traffic. Truck travel alone is expected to grow 50 percent by 2020, resulting in the need for capacity improvements on much of Iowa's interstate system.

Although setting aside decades-old disputes between rural and city legislators is a great first start, finding the new money to expand capacity and make improvements is the next tall hurdle. The tough work now begins for leaders and policymakers as they seek to identify new sources of revenue for Iowa's highway system. Time is of the essence: There has been a 44 percent increase since 1999 in the number of miles on the primary highway system that are deemed "deficient."

A legislative study committee will hold hearings and gather input about how to find new resources to enhance these key highway corridors. Our organization and other interested parties should look seriously at their recommendations in January.

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