

# THE Messenger

## NEWS

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### Senate panel passes highway bill

#### Beall calls it 'great news' for Highway 20

By BILL SHEA, Messenger staff writer

An Iowa Senate subcommittee took a step Tuesday toward eventually raising more money for the state's roads, including U.S. Highway 20.

Sen. Daryl Beall, D-Fort Dodge, said a ways and means subcommittee passed a bill that "legitimizes" a highway revenue plan known as TIME-21. He said the bill also creates an eight-member bipartisan panel to recommend ways of raising money for TIME-21. That panel is to submit a report to the Legislature by Jan. 1, 2008.

"The interim study committee will no doubt explore various funding sources, including fuel taxes, driver's license fees, registration fees and pickup license fees," Beall said.

The bill does not allocate any money for highways. It leaves that task to the bipartisan panel and future legislative sessions.

The measure must still pass the House and Senate and be signed into law by Gov. Chet Culver.

Although this year's legislative session is winding down, Beall said he believes there is enough support to pass the bill before lawmakers go home.

"I am delighted we're moving on this legislation this session," Beall said. "This is great news for those of us interested in a four-lane Highway 20."

The expansion of U.S. Highway 20 to four lanes all across Iowa is one of many road projects threatened by a money crunch. The state's ability to invest in roads is being squeezed by flat revenues and soaring construction costs. Transportation officials have said that if something doesn't change there will be no money for new highway construction after 2015.

To address the problem, the Iowa Department of Transportation late last year unveiled a proposal called Transportation Investment Moves the Economy in the 21st Century or TIME-21.

The proposal called for a variety of fee increases that would yield an additional \$200 million in annual road spending.

Money from TIME-21 would be divided between the state and local governments, with the state getting 60 percent of the money while the cities and counties each would get 20 percent.

The Senate bill is apparently the first piece of legislation to move forward in response to the TIME-21 proposal. Leaders of the House Transportation Committee were expected to introduce a bill that spelled out some fee increases, but that hasn't happened yet. Rep. David Tjepkes, R-Gowrie, is the senior Republican on that committee and had a major role in developing that proposal.

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