

Branstad creates commission on highway funding, Corridorians to co-chair

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By [Dave DeWitte/SourceMedia Group News](#)

AMES – Gov. Terry Branstad, saying better roads are crucial to his economic development plans, appointed a 12-member advisory commission on Tuesday, March 8 to evaluate funding needs and solutions.

The Transportation 2020 Commission panel will work for nine months and hold meetings throughout the state, the Governor said. It will be co-chaired by two Corridor residents. One is Allan Thoms of Cedar Rapids, who served as Branstad's chief of staff, has served as Iowa's economic development director, and has served on the state's transportation commission. The other is Iowa Department of Transportation Executive Director Nancy Richardson of Coralville, will also co-chair the commission.

“We know that transportation is critically important to meeting the goal of creating 200,000 jobs over the next five years,” Branstad said, referring to one of his campaign goals. He said the commission will engage citizens and create a dialogue about how to meet the state's transportation needs.

The governor presented his plans at Tuesday's meeting of the Iowa Transportation Commission, saying he has no intention for the commission to usurp the transportation commission's final authority over transportation decisions.

“It's going to take all of us working together,” he said.



Gov. Terry Branstad speaks to the Iowa Transportation Commission on the creation of the Transportation 2020 Commission on Tuesday, March 8, 2011, at Iowa Department of Transportation headquarters in Ames. (photo by Dave DeWitte/SourceMedia Group News)

Richardson said commission will work with a Road Use Tax Fund sufficiency analysis study that the Iowa Department of Transportation has begun. She said the commission will likely hold business meetings in late May and early June to talk about the needs gap, then take its findings to a series of at least six meetings around the state.

The statewide meetings would have a joint purpose of learning about the state's transportation needs and discussing the commission's findings regarding projected funding availability. The commission would create a final report to the legislature that would offer recommendations also identify solutions for funding the state's transportation needs, Richardson said.

"It would identify the vast amount of needs and the most critical of needs that can't be met," Richardson said.

The DOT is required to perform the Road Use Tax sufficiency studies every six years. Richardson said the last study offered options for meeting the needs gap, but a citizens commission could make specific recommendations if it chooses.

While clearly concerned about the availability of resources to meet transportation needs, Branstad this is not the time for a gas tax increase. With the arrival of electric cars and potential for "whole fleets of trucks to burn natural gas," he said the state may need to look at other funding solutions for transportation.

Many states have begun looking at a "vehicle miles tax" to replace gas taxes, Richardson said, considering the growing use of alternative fuel vehicles and the benefits of the tax in shaping motorist behavior.

"I still like the idea of a user fee," Branstad said, "the idea that the people who get the benefits of using it pay for it, but then how do you do that?"

The commission will include the chair and ranking member of the Iowa House of Representatives and Iowa senate transportation committees as ex-officio members.

The other members will be Clive Mayor Scott Cirksena, Western Dubuque superintendent of schools Jeff Corkery of Peosta, Sister Catherine Dunn of Dubuque, the first woman ever elected chair of the Iowa Transportation Commission, former state legislator Geri Huser of Altoona, former state senator Jim Kersten of Fort Dodge, farmer Lindsey Larson of Jefferson, Rose Mitchell of Hy-Vee Stores Inc. in West Des Moines, Ann Trimble Ray of Early, representing the Highway 20 Coalition, former transportation commission member Dan Wiedemeier of Burlington and banker Larry Winum of Glenwood.