

# Public meetings set to discuss Iowa's future transportation needs/funding

July 28, 2011, 9:52 am

By [Rod Boshart/SourceMedia Group News](#)

DES MOINES – A state advisory panel exploring funding options to address a projected yearly shortfall in revenue required to meet Iowa's future transportation needs has scheduled seven hearings in August and September to garner input from Iowans.

The Governor's Transportation 2020 Citizen Advisory Commission – a panel of 12 citizen members and four ex-officio lawmakers – has set meetings for Aug. 10 in Bettendorf, Aug. 17 in Mason City, Aug. 24 in Des Moines, Aug. 31 in Storm Lake, Sept. 7 in Council Bluffs, Sept. 14 in Waterloo, and Sept. 21 in Mount Pleasant.

The commission, which has been assigned to gather information about the state's future transportation needs and make recommendations on how best to fund them, will then hold two meetings in October to finalize its conclusions and report them to Gov. Terry Branstad and the 2012 Legislature.

During the commission's three initial meetings, state Department of Transportation (DOT) officials reported that past legislative action to raise vehicle registrations and other fees have reduced a shortfall for funding key transportation needs, but \$215 million in increased revenue yearly is still required to finance critical improvements and repair highways and bridges, state officials said Thursday.

A previous DOT study pegged the statewide transportation critical needs shortfall at \$267 million per year but that number has since been lowered as new revenue from higher vehicle fees rose to about \$97.5 million this year and is expected to peak at more than \$150 million by 2015. Without that influx, the shortfall likely would have hit \$400 million, DOT officials said.

Another concern looming on the horizon is the potential loss of more than \$100 million in federal transportation money to Iowa next fiscal year, officials said.

In addressing the panel at its kickoff session, Gov. Terry Branstad challenged the commission to come up with "new and innovative" ways of financing infrastructure needs, given the changing dynamic of vehicles powered by electricity or alternative fuel sources that are lighter and more efficient but traveling fewer travel miles on roadways heavily reliant on traditional fuel tax revenues.

"We need to make sure that all of those that use our transportation network pay a fair share towards it. It's not just looking at the traditional way of funding things with gas and diesel fuel tax. It's got to be different," the governor said. "We need to try to fashion a fair and equitable way to fund our transportation system and I think most people think it should be funded by the users and it should be done on a pay-as-you-go basis."

Along with raising the state's gas tax, DOT officials said other potential revenue sources that could be looked at included a per-mile tax, a sales tax, a severance tax on ethanol and various license and registration fees.

Representatives of contractors, bankers, developers, truckers, corn producers and municipal and county governmental entities already have addressed the panel in support of increased revenue – including a call to raise the state fuel tax by at least eight cents a gallon.

DOT officials said Iowa currently gets \$1.2 billion in yearly transportation money through the state's road-use tax fund, which annually takes in \$470 million from various vehicle-related fees

and \$430 million from fuel taxes currently set at 21 cents a gallon on sales of unleaded gasoline, 19 cents per gallon for ethanol-blended fuels and 22.5 cents a gallon for diesel. If the tax rate kept up with Iowa's construction cost index, those fuel tax rates would be 47.8 cents a gallon for unleaded gasoline, 45.4 cents for ethanol blends and 53.8 cents for diesel, they said.

Stuart Anderson, DOT director of planning and programming, said Iowa's gas tax was last raised in 1989 and currently ranks in the bottom third among states nationally.

Here is a more detailed list of the upcoming public hearings set by the commission:

Wednesday, Aug. 10, 6 – 8 p.m., Isle Casino Hotel, 1777 Isle Parkway, Isle Center Salon B, Bettendorf;

Wednesday, Aug. 17, 6 – 8 p.m., Music Man Square, 308 Pennsylvania Ave., Reunion Hall, Mason City;

Wednesday, Aug. 24, 6 – 8 p.m., Embassy Suites, Salon D, 101 E. Locust St., Des Moines;

Wednesday, Aug. 31, 6 – 8 p.m., Buena Vista University, 610 W. Fourth St., Harold Walter Siebens Forum, Anderson Auditorium, Storm Lake;

Wednesday, Sept. 7, 6 – 8 p.m., Mid-America Center, Room KL, One Arena Way, Council Bluffs;

Wednesday, Sept. 14, 6 – 8 p.m., Ramada Hotel Convention Center, Room 23, 205 W. Fourth St., Waterloo;

Wednesday, Sept. 21, 6 – 8 p.m., Iowa Wesleyan College, John Wesley Holland Student Union, Social Hall, 601 N. Main, Mount Pleasant.

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