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## U.S. 20 group backs hike in gas tax

### Registration fees would rise under proposal

November 5, 2011

By BILL SHEA, Messenger staff writer , Messenger News

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SAC CITY - Drivers would pay more for a gallon of gasoline under a draft proposal for raising additional money to finance road work in Iowa.

The proposal calls for raising the state tax on a gallon of gasoline by 8 to 10 cents. It also calls for increasing the fee for registering a new vehicle.

The recommendations were written by the Governor's Transportation 2020 Citizen Advisory Commission, which met throughout the year to study the problems of paying for road work. During their Friday meeting in Sac City, members of the U.S. 20 Corridor Association were briefed on the proposal by one of their colleagues, Ann Trimble-Ray, of Early. She was a member of the panel.

According to Trimble-Ray, the state faces an annual \$215 million "critical needs shortfall." She said that's the amount of money needed each year to keep the highways and bridges from crumbling.

In 2009, some vehicle registration fees were raised for a new road funding program called TIME-21. But that extra revenue isn't enough, she said.

"One of the basic functions of government is to provide infrastructure to its citizens and we are failing at that, flat out failing at that," Trimble-Ray said.

She said the proposed gasoline tax increase would generate an estimated \$184 million to \$230 million annually, she said.

Trimble-Ray said drivers from other states passing through Iowa would also pay the higher tax. About 13 percent of the state's road use tax fund money comes from the fuel taxes paid by out-of-state drivers, she said.

The state currently levies a gasoline tax of 21 cents per gallon.

Iowa now has a 5 percent fee for new registration on the sale of new and used vehicles and trailers. Trimble-Ray said the panel is recommending raising that to 6 percent to make it equal to the state sales tax rate. That increase would generate \$50 million annually.

Those are the only two of the panel's seven recommendations that deal directly with dollars and cents.

Other recommendations include finding a way to ensure that owners of hybrid and alternate fuel vehicles pay their fair share for road

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### Highway funding proposal

The draft report of the Governor's Transportation 2020 Citizen Advisory Commission includes these recommendations:

Increase the state fuel tax by 8 to 10 cents per gallon.

Increase the fee for new registration on the sale of new and used motor vehicles to 6 percent.

Develop a revenue plan that applies to alternate fuel and hybrid vehicles.

Allocate new revenues to the TIME-21 Fund up to the maximum of \$225 million and allocate the rest according to older road use tax formula.

Review highway funding needs every two years instead of every five years.

Direct the Iowa Department of Transportation to meet annually with counties and cities to jointly increase efficiency.

Conduct a study to determine if tax and fee systems should be changed to include farm machinery and other vehicles that use roads but pay little or nothing in fees.

upkeep since they will be paying less in gasoline taxes. However, the panel offered no specific ideas on that issue.

The panel also recommended conducting more frequent reviews of the highway funding needs.

Following Trimble-Ray's briefing, the association voted unanimously to endorse the panel's recommendations.

Those ideas are expected to be presented to the Iowa Transportation Commission next week. They will be presented to Gov. Terry Branstad by the end of the year, and to lawmakers when they convene in January.

Trimble-Ray said the panel held seven public hearings across the state and received 137 comments before drafting the proposal.

The U.S. 20 Corridor Association lobbies for widening its namesake highway to four lanes all across northern Iowa. After decades of work, a 79-mile stretch between Rockwell City in Calhoun County and Merville in Woodbury County is all that remains to be widened.

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