



Op-ed: Transportation funding boost will benefit state's economy

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By

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În recent weeks, Gov. Tom Corbett has given positive indication that he will make transportation funding a high priority in the upcoming legislative session starting in January.

The governor will likely announce his plan in the weeks ahead.



State Sen. John Rafferty, R-Berks, chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee, had previously announced that he will introduce a new transportation bill in the Senate in January.

Corbett and Rafferty have indicated that the bills funding components will include many of the basic tenets proposed in the Transportation Funding Advisory Commission Report issued in August 2011.

We applaud the governor and Sen. Rafferty for taking the lead to increase

transportation funding for Pennsylvania.

As widely reported, PennDOT has not had a funding increase in 15 years.

In addition, increased withdrawals from the motor license fund for the state police and improved vehicle gas mileage, resulting in less gas tax at the pump, have further eroded funding.

The ability to keep up with transportation infrastructure needs in Pennsylvania has declined steadily through the years.

Funding is needed to address maintenance issues, congestion and safety, new capacity and replacement of numerous deficient bridges in Pennsylvania.

As reported in the Transportation Funding Advisory Commission Report, an increase in funding of \$2.5 billion per year is needed for the critical activities cited above, deficient bridge replacement for local municipalities and funding for transit agencies throughout the state.

The cost of new funding will be about \$11 per month for each driver in Pennsylvania.

It is important to note that, while user fees and fuel taxes for transportation have not increased since 1997, the cost of utilities and monthly television cable costs have all increased as well as all consumer goods.

All of these increases amount to significantly more than the maximum increase of \$11/month required for new transportation funding.

An increase in transportation funding will have no effect on the state budget or budget deficit because transportation users pay totally for transportation funding through user fees and fuel taxes.

An increase in transportation funding will have a positive effect on the state economy.

The businesses engaged in the transportation industry have experienced significant job losses, particularly over the last several years.

An increase in funding will prevent further layoffs and will increase employment in the transportation industry in Pennsylvania: engineering firms, contractors, equipment providers, equipment manufacturers and suppliers including steel, concrete, aggregates, asphalt, to name a few.

Virtually all of the increased employment and associated salaries, and associated individual spending, as well as payroll taxes will remain in Pennsylvania.

What does the average Pennsylvania resident and highway user get for increased transportation funding?

Replacement or rehabilitation of numerous deficient bridges in the Commonwealth.

Reduction of congestion — funds will be available for improvements required at numerous intersections to reduce congestion.



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Increased capacity projects — funds will be available for projects which increase highway capacity in congested areas.

Congestion reduction projects have been non-existent over the past six years due to lack of funding.

Improved maintenance of our highways — maintenance projects on our highways have been gradually reduced over the years because of the lack of funding.

Safety improvements will be made on our highways where repeated accidents indicate that improvements need to be made.

Local municipalities will be provided with funding for bridge replacement — this is a highly critical need — many of Pennsylvania's smaller and rural boroughs and townships simply do not have the funds for bridge replacement or even required maintenance — many municipal bridges have been closed, and have not been replaced.

In addition to driver inconvenience, bridge closures negatively affect businesses and residents located in the vicinity of the bridge.

State transit agencies will be given increased funding. While some members of the Legislature, particularly the House, oppose transit funding, it is important to note that businesses and their employees in many counties in Pennsylvania who provide services to the transit agencies will also be positively affected.

The amount that the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission pays to PennDOT as mandated under Act 44, will be significantly reduced.

Pennsylvanians will benefit from the new anticipated transportation funding bill.

Our highways and bridges will be safer and congestion and associated time delays will be reduced.

We applaud the governor for taking the lead on a new transportation funding package and look forward to the early passage of a funding bill by the Senate and House in 2013.

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