

Issue:**Transportation Planning/Funding****Information:**

Having safe, timely maintained highways, roads and bridges is essential to furthering economic development and improving the welfare and safety of all West Virginia residents. West Virginia has invested significant public dollars over the past several decades to improve and expand its transportation infrastructure. However, more needs to be done. The WVU Bureau of Business and Economic Research recently released a study concluding, among other things, that the state Road Fund will need additional revenues to maintain and improve West Virginia's highway, road and bridge system.

Background:

West Virginia leads the United States in percentage of highway miles that are state maintained, that is, the state is responsible for 92 percent of the total highway miles in West Virginia. Although West Virginia has relatively high fuel taxes (25.35 cents per gallon), the demographics of the state result in relatively low travel miles and relatively low vehicle registrations.

West Virginia has approximately 38,900 miles of roads — the sixth-largest highway system in the nation. West Virginia is one of only four states that take care of both state and county roads. The Mountain State leads the nation in percentage (92 percent) of miles that are state maintained. West Virginia ranks second to last in the country in capital investment per state maintained mile - \$7,594 compared to the national average of \$23,967 per mile.

The revenue outlook for the State Road Fund is not very promising, according to a study by the WVU College of Business and Economics' Bureau of Business and Economic Research. While the actual revenue going into the fund increased from Fiscal Year 1970 to the present, the study indicates that the fund's value, after adjusting for inflation, peaked in Fiscal Year 1994. Since that time the real value has fallen and is projected to continue to fall through Fiscal Year 2008. The amount of funding available for surface transportation projects also is being severely constrained due to escalating commodity and raw material prices and the demographic and rural make-up of West Virginia. In addition, the West Virginia Department of Transportation has prepared a six-year plan that lists more than \$20 billion in proposed projects.

As a result, the report states that West Virginia will need to make some difficult choices regarding additional revenue sources to continue the development and maintenance of the state highway, road and bridge system.

A June 2006 report by The Road Information Program (TRIP) rated one percent of West Virginia's roads in poor condition, with an additional 9 percent in mediocre condition. The report also rated 19 percent of state bridges in substandard condition, seven percent as structurally deficient and 12 percent as functionally obsolete.

At 1.84 per 100 million vehicle miles, West Virginia's traffic fatality rate is nearly 30 percent higher than the national average of 1.44, and West Virginia leads the country in percentage of narrow lanes - 67 percent of its major roads have lanes less than 10 feet wide.

Action:

West Virginia's economy is dependent upon a safe and modern transportation system. Without sufficient revenues, West Virginia's surface transportation network will deteriorate, impacting mobility, safety and the state's overall economic well-being.

- The Charleston Regional Chamber of Commerce joins the West Virginia State Chamber in calling upon leaders on all levels and among divergent groups (business, education, economic development, construction, community, etc.) to analyze the needs and challenges facing the state's surface transportation system and to develop a long-range plan of action.