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blacktop and bridges

WHERE TO NOW? As we close out 2014, a big question looms: Will Idaho legislators tackle the state's \$262 million annual funding shortfall for roads and bridges in 2015? Despite strong evidence that highway costs continue to climb and investments are not keeping pace, the issue got another pass from the Idaho legislature this year.

The **Better Roads, Fair Funding** initiative (*betterroadsforidaho.com*) launched by AAA a year ago recognizes that all highway users have a financial stake in Idaho's roads and bridges. But the findings from Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter's 2010 Task Force on Modernizing Transportation Funding illustrate that passenger vehicles overpay their share of the burden, while some of the largest vehicles, which inflict more wear and tear, have been getting a break.

The AAA initiative triggered thoughtful conversations about how to pay for Idaho's aging transportation infrastructure. Idahoans who responded to the Better Roads website agreed that any long-term funding solutions must be transparent, accountable, and fair. Two surveys—one by the University of Idaho, the other commissioned by AAA—added fresh perspective to this issue. (See "Idaho Road Surveys" below.)

Nearly all the participants—98 percent—in the UI study agree that good roads are important for mobility

and a functioning economy. Yet both surveys confirm that a majority of Idahoans are not settled on any single solution, such as an increase in the state gas tax, which frequently tops the list of probable funding sources.

Vehicle registration fees have not been adjusted since 1997. While both surveys suggest that raising registration fees may be more politically palatable than other options, respondents seem intent on making sure that costs are equitably distributed among all vehicle classes, including commercial trucks.

Surveys are helpful in understanding public sentiment; the next logical step is a thoughtful dialogue with elected officials. Everyone who uses Idaho's roads and bridges should pay a fair share. Let your elected officials know the reasonable approaches you support to keep our state's infrastructure healthy.

What do you think? Email me at jim.manion@AAAidaho.com or write me at 7155 W. Denton St., Boise, ID 83704.



JIM MANION, IDAHO DIVISION PRESIDENT

The Road Ahead

IDAHO ROAD SURVEYS Recent public policy surveys reveal mixed sentiments among Idaho voters regarding future funding for Idaho roads and bridges.

According to a July 2014 survey by the University of Idaho's McClure Center for Public Policy Research, 98 percent of Idahoans see roads and bridges as key to the economy: 71 percent rated them "very important" and 27 percent "somewhat important." Similarly, 67 percent of respondents felt that state roads and bridges are in good to excellent condition. But just 31 percent gave that rating to county roads, and only 27 percent estimate that state roads will remain in

good to excellent shape 10 years from now. And 53 percent agree that increased road funding should be among the legislature's top three priorities.

In January 2014, a survey conducted by Riley Research Associates on behalf of AAA found drivers evenly divided on the subject of new or higher user fees: 47 percent in favor and 47 percent opposed. A full 71 percent of those surveyed for AAA were willing to pay more in user fees and taxes—provided that all vehicles were charged in proportion to the costs they impose on the road system.

A number of key issues were addressed by both »

» surveys. Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of respondents in the AAA survey felt that road costs attributable to each vehicle type—cars, light trucks, freight—should be paid by that vehicle group’s owners. In the University of Idaho survey, 68 percent of respondents supported increased registration fees for commercial vehicles.

In the AAA study, 42 percent supported an increase of 5 cents per gallon in the state fuel tax, compared with 35 percent in the UI study. There was also strong support in both survey groups for reappropriating sales tax receipts from tires and other automotive products to pay for roads and bridges: 64 percent in the AAA survey and 73 percent in the UI study.

Find the AAA report at AAA.com/roadsurvey. UI survey results are available at uidabo.edu/idaboatag glance.

TOTAL RECALL In August, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration launched a new database that allows consumers to search

for vehicle recall notices using the 17-digit vehicle identification number.

The search tool, accessible at safer.car.gov/vinlookup, covers safety recalls on domestic vehicles from the past 15 years. The database generates a brief description of any recall and notes whether the specific vehicle has had the problem fixed.



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