

Daily Transportation Update

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ROADWAYS & VEHICLES

Iowa Fee Increase Will Help Fix Bad Bridges

Story in *The Des Moines Register*.

The Des Moines Register

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Fee increase would help fix bad bridges

By WILLIAM PETROSKI
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Iowans will likely be required to pay higher state fees to register their cars and trucks and to renew their driver licenses to help address a \$200 million annual shortfall for highway repairs, a key lawmaker predicted Wednesday.

Sen. Tom Rielly, an Oskaloosa Democrat, is chairman of the Iowa Senate Transportation Committee. He made his comments as a study was released showing that Iowa has the fourth-highest percentage of structurally deficient bridges in the nation.

The report said Iowa's bridges remain safe, but it warned that the state is falling behind in repairs.

Gov. Chet Culver has ruled out an increase in Iowa's gasoline tax, but Rielly said he expects the House and Senate to pass legislation this session that would raise vehicle registration fees and driver license fees. Exactly how the fees would be raised is still under discussion, he added.

"I am very confident that we are going to get something done this year," Rielly said. "These are very, very serious issues as they relate to roads and bridges."

The bridge study was conducted by TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based organization financed by road construction companies, labor unions, insurance companies, distributors and suppliers. The group's findings, based on government data, mirror a report by the Iowa Department of Transportation last year that concluded the state needs an additional \$4 billion over the next two decades for road construction and repairs.

The TRIP report said 5,153 Iowa bridges, representing 21 percent of all of Iowa's city, county and state bridges, are structurally deficient, showing significant deterioration to their decks or to other major components. Another 1,455 bridges, or 6 percent of the total, are rated as functionally obsolete because they no longer meet current design and safety standards.

"An efficient and safe transportation system is crucial to a high quality of life, and a high level of safety ... but that system will perform only as well as its bridges will allow," said Carolyn Bonifas, who authored the study.

David Scott, executive director of the Iowa Good Roads Association, a highway lobby group, said Iowa has not had a major increase in revenues for road projects since 1989. Construction costs have increased dramatically since then.

"It's time to quit studying it, and time to start fixing it," Scott said.

Larry Winum, president of Glenwood State Bank and a representative of Iowa banking groups, called on lawmakers to develop "some sort of funding mechanism" to improve roads for economic development. But he offered no support for a tax increase to finance road projects.

"I don't want anybody to think that a banker is going to stand up here and say that we should raise taxes," he said. "That is just kind of unbanker-like."