

Stimulus funding helps close Idaho's bridge, highway funding shortfall

Funds not adequate for improvements needed for long-term growth

March 20, 2009

The approval of the federal stimulus package will provide a welcome down payment toward meeting Idaho's funding shortfall for projects to address the deficiencies on its roads, highways and bridge.

But it will not be adequate to allow the rapidly growing state to proceed with numerous projects needed to modernize its surface transportation system and allow for long-term economic development, according to a new TRIP report.

According to the report, "Future Mobility in Idaho: Meeting the State's Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility," the infusion of \$182 million in stimulus funding and the use of federal bond revenue will allow Idaho to maintain its current road, highway and bridge program in 2009 and increase roadway investment in 2010.

However, the state's investment in road and bridge repairs and improvements will drop significantly in 2011, 2012 and 2013 as the stimulus package and bond programs conclude and the cost of repaying the bonds escalates. From 2011 to 2013, spending for highway improvements will average 19% lower than from 2006 to 2008. And by 2013, Idaho's construction expenditures will be approximately two-thirds of the 2009 level.

Further exacerbating the funding shortfall is the escalation of the price of key materials used for highway construction. From January 2003 to January 2009, the average cost of materials used for highway construction rose 44%.

"The TRIP report on Idaho transportation highlights what all Idahoans already know: Our roads are deteriorating, and state government needs to act now to provide adequate funding to

increase safety and enhance our state's economic vitality," said Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter.

The Idaho Transportation Department has identified numerous needed transportation improvement projects that cannot move forward without additional transportation funding. These projects include rehabilitating dozens of aging bridges and overpasses; modernizing sections of US 95, US 20 and SH 31; adding a 6.7 mile route along SH 16; widening a 10-mile section of SH 75; realigning a 10-mile stretch of I-15; and upgrading interchanges on I-84. The report contains a full list of needed projects that are currently unfunded.

One quarter of the state's roads are deficient, with 11% rated in poor condition and an additional 14% in mediocre condition. TRIP estimates that roads in need of repair cost each Idaho motorist an average of \$318 annually in extra vehicle operation costs—\$311 million statewide.

A total of 19% of Idaho's bridges are deficient. In 2008, eight percent of the state's bridges (20 ft or longer) were rated as structurally deficient, while 11% were rated functionally obsolete. The report contains a list of needed bridge rehabilitation and replacement projects that currently lack adequate funding to proceed.

"Idaho has an immediate need to move forward with vital rehabilitation and expansion projects, but funding for these critical projects is currently not available," said William M. Wilkins, executive director of TRIP. "Completing needed, unfunded projects would increase mobility, enhance economic development and growth and improve the quality of life in Idaho."