

Stimulus money will not modernize roads in South Dakota

TRIP report indicates more is needed for the long run

February 13, 2009

The approval of the federal stimulus package will provide a welcome boost to South Dakota's ability to address the high rate of deficiencies on its roads, highways and bridges, but will not be adequate to allow the state to proceed with numerous projects needed to modernize its transportation system.

According to the TRIP report "Future Mobility in South Dakota: Meeting the State's Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility and the Role of the Federal Surface Transportation Program in Providing Mobility in South Dakota," the state has a significant level of deficiencies on its roads, highways and bridges, as well as a high-rate of fatal traffic crashes, which would benefit from increased funding for repairs to improve the condition and safety of South Dakota's roads, highways and bridges.

"South Dakota highway funding is facing a crisis. Beyond a doubt, we have established that local and state governments need an additional \$250 million to keep our roads safe and in good shape for the traveling public. We can't be distracted by the federal economic stimulus money. It won't solve the highway funding crisis in South Dakota, because it is a one-time patch, and furthermore can't be used for any of the state operations and maintenance needs," said South Dakota Highway Users Chairman Steve Willard. "We have big funding needs that demand immediate action on a state level," he added.

While approval of the federal stimulus package would be helpful in speeding road and bridge repair projects in South Dakota, it will not be adequate to allow the state to move forward on numerous projects to support long-term economic development in the state, including improvements to SD-34 from Madison to I-29; the Teddy Roosevelt Expressway (U.S. 85 Belle Fourche to North Dakota); U.S. 12 from Mobridge to Aberdeen; U.S. 81 from Yankton to I-90; and the construction of a new I-29 interchange near Summit, the TRIP report found.

South Dakota is ranked fifth nationally in its share of deficient bridges, with 21% of its bridges rated as structurally deficient in 2008. Approximately a third of its major roads and highways also are deficient, with 15% of South Dakota's major roads rated in poor condition and 19% rated in mediocre condition in 2007. TRIP estimates that additional vehicle operating costs borne by South Dakota motorists as a result of poor road conditions is \$180 million annually, or \$319 per motorist.

The TRIP report also found that South Dakota has averaged 168 traffic deaths annually over the last five years, and that improvements in roadway safety design can have a significant positive impact in reducing serious and fatal traffic crashes.

"So many legislators, groups and government agencies have pulled together to have good discussions about what should be done about

the need for more money for roads in South Dakota. All of these good ideas are coming together during the next couple of weeks at the legislative session," Willard said. "We encourage legislators to take action now to keep our roads safe and in good traveling condition."

The federal surface transportation program remains a critical source of funding for road and bridge repairs in South Dakota, the report found. From 1998 to 2007, South Dakota received \$2.4 billion in federal funding for road, highway and bridge improvements, 55% of revenues used annually by the South Dakota Department of Transportation to pay for road, highway and bridge construction, repairs and maintenance.

The current federal transportation program expires on September 30, 2009, requiring Congress to authorize a new federal surface transportation program or extend the current program to allow federal highway dollars to continue to be provided to South Dakota.

"South Dakota has benefited tremendously from the federal transportation program," said William M. Wilkins, executive director of TRIP. "It is critical for the state's economic recovery that approval of the federal stimulus package is followed by additional state action and timely and adequately funded authorization of a new federal surface transportation program in 2009."

Source: *TRIP*