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TRIP Report Evaluates ID Transportation Needs

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 bridges, but 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.

The Road Information Program (TRIP), a national nonprofit transportation research group based in Washington, DC, has issued a new report "Future Mobility in Idaho: Meeting the State's Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility," that analyzes road and bridge conditions, traffic congestion, economic development, highway safety, and transportation funding in Idaho, as well as the impact of funds received from the federal stimulus package. The report also contains lists of Idaho's most deteriorated roadways, deficient bridges, most congested sections of roadway, and needed projects that currently lack adequate funding to proceed.

According to the TRIP report, 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 percent lower than over the time period 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 percent.

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"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 (ITD) has identified numerous needed transportation improvement projects that can not 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
- Upgrading interchanges on I-84

The report contains a full list of needed projects that are currently unfunded.

The TRIP report further states, from 1990 to 2007, Idaho's population increased by 49 percent and vehicle travel on the state's roads increased by 60 percent. This rapid increase has far outstripped the capacity of the existing transportation system, leading to increased congestion. Forty percent of Idaho's major urban highways are now congested. Travel delays are projected to double over the next 25 years, creating significant delays in the state's major urban areas. By 2035, vehicle travel is expected to nearly double, and Idaho's population will increase an additional 40 percent.

One-quarter of the state's roads are deficient, with 11 percent rated in poor condition and an additional 14 percent 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. These costs include accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs, and increased fuel consumption and tire wear. The TRIP report contains a list of the most deteriorated roadways in the state, as well as a list of needed roadway preservation projects that currently lack adequate funding to proceed.

A total of 19 percent of Idaho's bridges are deficient. In 2008, eight percent of the state's bridges (20 feet or longer) were rated as structurally deficient, while 11 percent were rated functionally obsolete. A bridge is structurally deficient if there is a condition that warrants attention on the deck, superstructure, or substructure of the bridge. Functionally obsolete bridges no longer meet modern design standards for safety features such as lane widths or alignment with connecting roads, or are no longer adequate to serve the volume of traffic being carried. The report contains a list of needed bridge rehabilitation and replacement projects that currently lack adequate funding to

proceed.

"This report provides additional reinforcement that our state government must act responsibly and rapidly to provide the necessary funding to repair and maintain Idaho's roads. Delaying action will only increase the cost of future solutions," said Charles Ranstrom, president of the Idaho Associated General Contractors of America (Idaho AGC).

The TRIP report also found that Idaho has averaged 269 traffic deaths annually from 2003 to 2007, and the rate of traffic fatalities in Idaho in 2007 - 1.60 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel - was 18 percent higher than the national average of 1.36.

"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."



This report follows a vote by the Idaho House Transportation Committee on Tuesday to give all House lawmakers a say on two bills that would raise vehicle registration fees and the state gas tax over three years.

The bills, negotiated by Gov. Otter with House leaders, would increase the gas tax from 25 cents to 32 cents per gallon and registration fees on both cars and trucks. Fees for heavy trucks would rise 5 percent. Fees for cars and light trucks would increase according to age of the vehicle, ranging from \$84 for newer vehicles to \$36 for vehicles more than 8 years old.

The House vote is scheduled for today. If passed, the IDT would get about \$65 million, while local highway districts would see their revenue increase about \$40 million. The two measures would raise a total of \$105 million annually after three years.

This is the kind of positive action that states need to take to strengthen their local economy and build for the future. Idaho deserves praise for its forward thinking and dramatic actions.