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ROAD WORK

FRONT PAGE

REPORT BACKS UP NEED FOR LOCAL CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

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Warren County Judge Executive Mike Buchanon speaks on Tuesday, February 27, 2018, at the Warren County Courthouse. (Austin Anthony/photo@bgdailynews.com)

Rocky Moretti was preaching to the choir Tuesday morning, and he may have heard some "amens" as he cited statistics that point out the need for road improvements in and around Bowling Green.

Moretti, director of policy and research for a national transportation research group called TRIP, came to the Warren County Courthouse to release a report on conditions of roads and bridges in the 10 counties that make up District 3 of the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet. That work is needed to make local roadways safer is not news to Moretti's audience of Warren County Judge-Executive Mike Buchanon and many of the Warren County Fiscal Court magistrates. But Moretti's report may provide more ammunition as those local elected officials look for help from Frankfort in getting needed transportation upgrades on state highways. Moretti, who has compiled reports for all 12 of Kentucky's KYTC districts and is making presentations throughout the state this week, pointed out in his report that Kentucky in general and District 3 in particular have some issues when it comes to highway safety.

For the three-year period of 2014-2016, the traffic fatality rate in District 3 was 1.57 deaths per 100 million miles of vehicle travel, slightly higher than the statewide average of 1.54 and significantly above the national figure of 1.08.

According to Moretti's report. District 3 averaged 55 traffic fatalities per year during that three-year period, a statistic that caught the attention of Warren County Fifth District Magistrate Mark Young.

"What surprised me was the number of deaths," Young said. "It's sad that we have that many." Sadder still, for Young, is that many of those deaths may have been prevented if needed road upgrades had been made. Ky. 185, or Richardsville Road, runs through the portion of the county that Young represents, and the

winding rural road claimed two traffic deaths in 2016 and three more in 2017.

"That road was scheduled to be improved from Richardsville to the Butler County line years ago," Young pointed out. "All the engineering work and the route had been finalized, and some property had been bought." Then the state put the brakes on the project and others as part of its "Pause-50" program brought about by budget shortfalls.

"I hope they'd go back and revisit that project," Young said. "That's a major corridor for people coming from Butler, Grayson and Edmonson counties. At some point, if you don't go ahead with that project you'll have to do the engineering again, and that's expensive. It doesn't make sense." And Ky. 185 isn't the only project on Buchanon's radar.

"We have a number of state roads being improved, but several have been put off because of funding,' Buchanon said. "Cemetery Road needs widening. Nashville Road widening needs to be completed to Simpson County. And anyone who travels Scottsville Road at five o'clock knows that it needs improvements. "There's never going to be enough funding to do everything we know needs to be done. But every time we put something off, it makes it more costly."

TRIP's work, funded in part by the Kentucky Magistrates and Commissioners Association and the

nonprofit Kentuckians for Better Transportation (KBT) group, demonstrates the need for changes in how state highways are funded, according to KBT Executive Director Juva Barber.

Barber points out that the state's motor fuels tax is tied to the wholesale price of fuel, which fluctuates.

"In 2015, when the average wholesale price declined, it lowered the tax rate," Barber said. "We need to do something that would guarantee funding."

Barber also pointed out that technology is creating a loss in revenue for state highway maintenance and upgrades. Drivers of electric vehicles, she said, don't buy gas and thus don't pay to maintain the roads those cars travel on. She also said the state legislature has diverted money from the road fund in years past. "Infrastructure is important," Barber said. "We need to make sure the motor fuels tax is applied





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in a way that is more consistent. We need to figure out how much we need for our highways per year and structure the tax accordingly." The TRIP report did paint a mostly positive picture of how county roads are being maintained in this region. According to the study, 56 percent of those roads are in good condition and another 28 percent are in fair condition, leaving only 17 percent in poor condition, meaning they are showing signs of deterioration.

The report shows KYTC District 3 stacking up well against other districts in the western part of the state. In District 1, which includes Graves, Marshall and eight other far-western counties, 39 percent of county-maintained roads needs to be resurfaced, compared to 18 percent in District 3.

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