



Editorial: Transportation funds disappearing

By [The Capital-Journal](#)

A recent report from the national transportation research group TRIP questions Kansas' ability to maintain its highway infrastructure in the future due to the uncertainty of federal transportation spending and the continuing siphoning of state transportation funds for other purposes.

That concern is shared here, especially as Gov. Sam Brownback has proposed transferring about \$96 million from the Kansas Department of Transportation's highway funds to help plug a \$279 million gap between revenues and expenditures in the state budget for the current fiscal year.

Brownback's administration is not the first to pull highway funds from KDOT to deal with other, pressing financial issues. In fact, treating KDOT funds — at least those raised through special sales taxes earmarked for transportation infrastructure improvements — as a “rainy day” fund is close to becoming a tradition in Kansas.

It is a practice that should be stopped, but we aren't foolish enough to think the governor and legislators aren't going to turn to KDOT funds to shore up the current budget, and probably the budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1.

A spokeswoman for Brownback said last week that KDOT still would have sufficient funding to complete “all announced” T-WORKS (the name for the infrastructure program being financed by the most recent special sales tax) projects.

That may be, but more than \$1 billion has been diverted from that program over the past five years alone for other uses. That money could have been used to fund a lot of projects, call them “unannounced” if you will, once the special sales tax expires. That money could have paved a lot of roads, built many overpasses and replaced a lot of outdated bridges. As it is, some of that work will have to wait, perhaps until Kansas are again asked to pay another special tax for infrastructure.

At some point, legislators and the governor are going to have to become much more proficient about matching revenues with spending when preparing state budgets.

As for federal transportation funding, which is set to expire in May, Congress should waste little time in addressing the issue and renewing its own commitment to the nation's infrastructure.

Another funding stream for infrastructure is the state's gasoline excise tax. The American Petroleum Institute reports Kansans now pay 42.43 cents per gallon in combined state and federal excise taxes. That's less than the national average of 49.28 cents but more than that paid by residents of Colorado (40.4 cents), Missouri (35.7 cents) and Oklahoma (35.4 cents). Nebraskans pay a combined 45.7 cents per gallon.

A higher state excise tax would produce more highway funds, but can anyone be sure it would be used for the intended purpose?