

## EDITORIAL

### More highway robbery



The state's transportation plan is targeted for more fund raids.

Though administration officials continue to say all announced projects will be completed – making it fair to wonder whether the highway plan was overfunded and Kansans therefore have been overtaxed for it – the administration now acknowledges that \$297 million worth of maintenance and nonspecified projects will at least be [delayed](#) as a result of the transfers.

And the threat might not end there: Transportation Secretary Mike King warned lawmakers Tuesday that there would be cuts to projects this calendar year if they redirected the state highway fund's dedicated 0.4-cent sales tax, a move that would affect the state's borrowing ability.

Despite the assurances, local government leaders across the state have to be nervous, especially if the 0.4-cent sales tax is being targeted. The announced projects in Sedgwick County include the long-overdue \$154 million interchange improvements at I-235 and Kellogg (with construction scheduled for October 2015 through January 2017) and more work on the East Kellogg freeway expansion (2016). It would be painful to see either project pushed further into the future.

Meanwhile, a new [report](#) by TRIP, a national transportation research group based in Washington, D.C., noted the benefits of the 2010 transportation plan but [said](#) 29 percent of "Kansas' major locally and state-maintained urban roads and highways have pavements in poor condition, while an additional 46 percent of the state's major roads are rated in mediocre or fair condition." It also found that 17 percent of locally and state-maintained bridges "show significant deterioration or do not meet current design standards." The report from TRIP, which is funded partly by highway contractors, further expressed well-founded concern about what will happen after the eight-month extension of federal highway funding expires in May.

Cuts to Kansas' road construction may be unavoidable and even politically acceptable, especially given the alternatives available to lawmakers as they try to solve the self-imposed budget crisis and also how favorably Kansas' highways compare with routes in neighboring states. Many Kansans would rather put up with potholes than see funding slashed for K-12 and higher education or social services.

It will be up to legislators and the governor to balance the budget without sacrificing high-quality highways.

For the editorial board, Rhonda Holman

Kansas is mandated by its constitution to have a balanced budget, while its highways are top-notch by choice and tradition.

Gov. Sam Brownback's two-year budget proposal puts these two fiscal priorities in further conflict, as the 10-year, \$8 billion transportation plan is targeted for more fund raids to offset the revenue shortfall caused by his income tax cuts.

Brownback wants to divert \$350 million of transportation funding from 2015 to 2017 to help close the state's budget gap, including \$151 million for the current year – after \$1.2 billion in transfers over the past five years.