

**EDITORIAL**

## **Infrastructure spending can't be political**

Montana's roads are in such bad shape, they are costing every man, woman and child in the state nearly \$800 annually in wrecks, delays and increased vehicle wear and tear.

That's the conclusion of TRIP, a national research group that conducted a study of the state's roads and bridges. The study concluded that only about a quarter of Montana's major urban roads are in good shape while a third are considered to be in poor condition. And that's costing Montana drivers an additional \$794 million a year.

The study should be a wake-up call for lawmakers meeting in Helena.

Legislators failed to pass any significant infrastructure spending in the 2015 session. A bill that would have funded some \$300 million for the work dwindled to \$150 million on committee votes. And then that was killed in the final hours of the session by partisan bickering over borrowing some of the money at historically low interest rates or paying for it out of an anticipated budget surplus — one that has largely evaporated due to falling energy industry tax revenue.

Montanans need to let their representatives and senators know that will not be acceptable this time around.

Gov. Steve Bullock is proposing \$293 million on public works spending with about half of that to be funded through the sale of bonds. The Montana Infrastructure Coalition, a group of engineers, contractors, unions, local governments and business interests are pushing a 10-cent-a-gallon gas tax increase to help fund infrastructure improvements. That kind of broad support along with the TRIP study should be ample evidence to lawmakers that this is not just a political issue. It's a pocketbook issue that is hurting Montanans financially in measurable ways.

It would be naïve to suggest that 150 lawmakers be unanimous in their support for anything. And there will be disagreements about infrastructure spending. But when differences arise, compromise. That's what adults do.

And that's what their constituents expect and pay lawmakers to do.