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Wells calls for increase in state gas tax



Franklin County Judge-Executive Huston Wells (right) discusses road conditions with Planning, Zoning, & Building Code Enforcement Director Robert Hewitt (center) and Louisville Director of Transportation John Callihan. (Alfred Miller/alfred.miller@state-journal.com)



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Franklin County Judge-Executive Huston Wells is throwing his support behind a proposed 10-cents-per-gallon increase in the state gas tax that he says will fund much-needed road improvements.

“The gas tax is our true funding source,” Wells said at a news conference Thursday to announce the results of a recent survey of road conditions.

The conference was one of 12 across the state hosted by TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based group, formerly known as the Road Information Program, that is funded by the transportation industry and works to improve highway conditions.

In its survey of Kentucky Magistrates and Commissioners Association members, TRIP found that 22 percent of county-maintained roads in Highway District 5, which includes Franklin County along with Bullitt, Henry, Jefferson, Oldham, Shelby, Spencer and Trimble counties, need resurfacing. Currently, funding exists for only about a quarter of those roads to be resurfaced, the group said in its report.

“The time to invest more in our roads and bridges is now,” Wells is quoted as saying in a TRIP news release. “Delays will drive up the costs and put us further behind our competitor states, many of which already have increased their investments in infrastructure.”

House Bill 609, introduced Tuesday by state Rep. Sal Santoro, R-Florence, and Rep. John Sims Jr., D-Flemingsburg, would raise the gas tax by 10 cents per gallon and impose annual fees on hybrid and electric vehicles. At Thursday’s news conference, Wells defended the increases by noting that gas prices often fluctuate by more than 10 cents from day to day and by region, thus rendering a potential hike less noticeable at the pump.

That additional tax revenue would grow the pool of money available for blacktopping county roads and repairing bridges, Wells told The State Journal. Of the structurally deficient bridges in Highway District 5, Franklin County’s Harvieland Road bridge, built in 1950, and downtown “Singing Bridge,” built in 1893, are ranked eighth and 14th worst according to ratings of their deck, substructure and superstructure, TRIP said in its report.

The tax revenue could also contribute to the state’s portion of a proposed widening of Interstate 64 near the on-ramp from KY-151. Wells said a widening would improve safety at an “extremely dangerous” interchange.

Repaving currently costs the county about \$100,000 per mile of road, Wells said.