

ROASTED ROOTS

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The Forum

OF FARGO - MOORHEAD

FRONT PAGE

LATE EDITION

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2018

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Study finds North Dakota infrastructure funding shortage

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FARGO — North Dakota's roads, bridges and highways are in dire need of improvements, but the state still needs additional investments to fix the conditions, according to a report released Tuesday, Oct. 9.

The report conducted by TRIP, a national transportation research group, said North Dakota is short \$2.5 billion for infrastructure needs for projects dealing with aging highway and bridge conditions, road improvements and safety.

The shortage is partly due to decreasing energy-related revenues — money generated through oil production and extraction — that have been used to fund transportation projects.

The report said infrastructure funding generated through energy-related revenues dropped by a large percentage in the past year, going from \$619 million in 2017 to \$194 million in 2018.

In addition, a significant share of the nearly \$3 billion in transportation funding that came through oil production went back to improving infrastructure conditions in oil producing areas, Moretti said.

The report said 23 transportation and infrastructure projects, three of which are in Cass County, are currently on hold due to a lack of funding.

Arik Spencer, president and CEO of the Greater North Dakota Chamber, said North Dakota now needs to balance its past investments in infrastructure in oil producing counties and cities with the increasing need for transportation improvements across the state.

One possible way to deal with the existing gap in infrastructure funding is a

state senate proposal that would fund \$230 million to projects in non-oil producing cities, counties and townships.

Senate Majority Leader Richard Wardner of Dickinson said he will introduce the proposal in January when the legislature meets.

Wardner said the proposal would invest \$115 million to projects in cities and another \$115 million for projects in counties and townships.

While the proposal won't solve all of the funding issues, "it's sure gonna help," Wardner said.

Wardner added that about eight of the 17 oil-producing counties will receive some of the funding because they produce less oil.

At a press conference held Tuesday morning, Oct. 9, Moretti said North Dakota's infrastructure needs to improve considering the state's growing economy and populations trends.

According to the report, nearly two-thirds of North Dakota's major urban roads have pavements in either poor or mediocre condition.

The report said about 14 percent of the state's bridges are considered deficient, where there is significant deterioration of major parts of the bridge.

In addition, traffic crashes caused 643 deaths between 2013 and 2017, the report said, with the traffic fatality rate nearly four times higher on rural, non-interstate roads.

Moretti said North Dakota's roads are vital to the state's economy with heavy

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Ice: C-14