

OPINION/FORUM

Column: Gas tax is fair price for safety, economy and jobs

On July 1, Ohio drivers will start paying an additional tax of 10.5 cents per gallon of gasoline and 19 cents per gallon of diesel, thanks to the transportation bill passed recently by the Ohio General Assembly and [signed into law](#) by Gov. Mike DeWine.

It's a tax almost nobody wants to pay. But a deeper look shows it's one of the best investments in our economy and our workforce that could be made.

The gasoline tax will raise an expected \$865 million a year in additional funds for roads, highways and bridges.

To do this, almost all of us will pay at the pump. But consider: Ohio drivers now pay \$12 billion a year in vehicle operating costs due to road conditions, including traffic delays and crashes — as much as \$2,180 per driver — according to national transportation research group TRIP. We pay \$3.9 billion alone in condition-related traffic injuries and deaths, and \$4.6 billion in lost time and wasted fuel.

If this were not enough of a reason to fix our roads and bridges, the economic impact of the gas tax should be.

Ohio has one of the most-traveled transportation systems in the country. We move almost anything that can be sold across Ohio and to 60 percent of the populations of the United States and Canada.

Businesses of all kinds rely on the state's highway and bridge infrastructure, and decisions whether to locate here can hinge on how well and how fast they will be able to serve their markets.

Yet a whopping one-third of major urban roads and highways have either poor or mediocre surface conditions. Anybody who's bent a wheel or blown a tire on a pothole understands this firsthand. These conditions present not only a challenge to fix the roads but an opportunity to put hundreds of thousands of skilled Ohioans to work improving our transportation infrastructure.

The men and women I work with — members of the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 18 — build 99 percent of the roads and highways in Ohio. They are trained through rigorous apprenticeship programs and on-the-job experience. They work in good-paying jobs, benefit from a good health care plan and retire with a pension that allows them to live comfortably after their years of service.

The gasoline tax will provide steady work for those currently working in our industry and create new jobs for others seeking rewarding careers. Now is a great time for Ohioans to take advantage of these new opportunities by expanding their view of what a successful career may look like.

I often talk with parents and students who see college as the only path to

success. While college is the right choice for many Ohioans, my members have found career success and satisfaction without the heavy debt and uncertainty that plague so many young college graduates.

And working in our industry does not prevent our members from pursuing college while working.

Members who work for companies that participate have an amount diverted from their wage package to fund annual scholarship awards, which can be used for tuition, fees and books.

In short, Gov. DeWine did not just sign a gas tax bill. He signed a jobs bill.

The new gas tax will not go far enough to solve some of the long-term challenges of building and maintaining Ohio's highway and bridge system. But it's a giant step from where we were before. I thank the General Assembly and Gov. DeWine for their willingness to do something both unpopular and absolutely necessary.

And I urge Ohioans — parents, high school graduates and midcareer workers — to consider the opportunities that are coming because, in the long run, the gas tax is a win-win for motorists, businesses and Ohio's workforce.

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