

## EDITORIAL

# Our View: Funding capital bill bitter pill that needs to be swallowed

If you asked any Illinoisan whether he or she supports a capital bill to address infrastructure improvements, the answer will likely be yes.

Whether it's a chunk of concrete falling off a bridge, that pothole on the way to work that never gets filled, an aging sewer or water system, or any other piece of infrastructure, every voter has a story about a fix that needs to be made. That's why the American Society of Civil Engineers, which grades the nation's infrastructure every four years, gave America a D-plus in its last ranking.

Yet when you ask how those much-needed repairs should be paid for, and whether taxpayers would be willing to dig a little deeper into their pockets to pay for it ... well, then the answer might be a little different.

The repairs we all want won't come free. And the longer we wait, the more they will cost. But you can't fault everyday Joes and Janes for not saying, "Here, take my money," to pay these costs when lawmakers decide to do a once-a-decade, massively expensive infrastructure plan, instead of addressing the needs as they arise. Regular Illinoisans already feel the financial pain from the lack of action: On May 15, TRIP, a transportation research group, [announced that it costs Illinois motorists](#) more than \$18 billion a year in damaged vehicles and wasted time to navigate the state's congested and crumbling roads.

The idea of shelling out even more is a hard sell. Yet [Gov. J.B. Pritzker's proposed \\$41.5 billion capital plan](#) has to be paid for somehow. The six-year program includes both transportation and vertical building projects, using a combination of state, federal and local funds.

Much of the funding for his plan would come from raising the state's share of the gas tax to 38 cents per gallon, up from 19 cents. Other suggested ways of raising the money: increasing the annual license plate renewal fee, with the cost tied to the age of the vehicle; raising the fee charged for electric vehicles to \$250 annually, up from \$34 every other year; and upping real estate transfer fees, liquor gallonage taxes, and taxes on video gaming terminals.

New taxes on cable, satellite and streaming services have been proposed, as have a parking garage tax and a tax on ride-sharing services like Lyft and Uber.

That's a lot to take at once, especially with the legislature considering other tax and fee increases outside the capital plan. And we have questions about most of the various new and increased fees that have been proposed. But at a minimum, the gasoline tax and increased fees for license plates should be approved. If we want better infrastructure, we need to be willing to pay for it. No private

enterprise is going to offer to pay for these.

There is little hope that a federal infrastructure bill might provide some funding anytime soon. It should be easy pass — it would create better infrastructure while also promising jobs and an economic boost — but it's become one more political football for Democrats and Republicans to fight over. It would be easier for Illinois leaders if they knew what the feds might do, especially because an increase in the federal gasoline tax is probably a given if Congress approves a plan, too. But it seems unlikely that the Washington politicians will come to an agreement on this issue anytime soon. Our roads, bridges and buildings needed attention last year (or five or 10 years ago in many cases). Illinois cannot wait.

We can bemoan the consequences the state now faces because of past inaction. The state's share of the gasoline tax, for instance, hasn't been increased since 1990. Imagine the projects that could have been undertaken if it had been raised a penny every other year.

But shaking our fists at the past doesn't help us today. Today, in the present, we need to focus on ensuring our future has stronger infrastructure. That means funding a capital bill at the state level.