

Opinion: New funding plan needed to fix roads, infrastructure

Rob Coppersmith | January 30, 2023



Nic Antaya for Crain's Detroit Business

A worker fixes potholes in February 2022 along Hayes Road in Sterling Heights.



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more than 42 percent of Michigan's lane miles are rated in poor condition. If we stay on the path we're on, we'll see that number rise to nearly 50 percent by 2031.

This is unacceptable.

The 2022 TRIP Report estimated that the poor condition of Michigan roads costs the average household \$4,845 annually due to traffic crashes, congestion caused by unreliable roads, and the cost to repair cars due to roads in bad shape. The report shows that if we don't make a significant investment soon, the average household could be spending as much as \$6,273 annually at the end of the next 10 years.

And it only gets worse.

The American Society of Civil Engineers issued a grade of D- for Michigan's roads in its Report Card for Michigan's Infrastructure. And according to the American Road and Transportation Builders Association, 11 percent or 1,240 of Michigan's 11,284 bridges, are classified as structurally deficient. Michigan families use these bridges to get to school, work and vacation.

It's time to take investing in our infrastructure seriously.

Former Gov. Rick Snyder's 21st Century Infrastructure Commission issued a report in 2016 that found Michigan needs an additional \$2.2 billion in annual funding over a 20-year period to get 85 to 90 percent of our roads up to good condition. Since then, Michigan's leaders have not dedicated the needed funds to get our roads up to that level and our need has grown substantially since then.

Unfortunately, Michigan's gas tax, which contributes about half of our funding for infrastructure construction and maintenance, is facing an uncertain future. With the rise in fuel efficiency and popularity of electric vehicles, we are faced with declining revenues generated from the gas pump. That much-needed revenue will only continue to fall in the years to come.

In recent years, we've had a series of short-term infrastructure investments, such as the Building Michigan Together Plan that will pump \$4.7 billion of state surplus and federal stimulus dollars into infrastructure repairs and upgrades. The federal infrastructure plan enacted in late 2021 is also providing a short-term boost over the next several years. And the \$3.5 billion bonding program that began during Whitmer's first term provides another short-term injection of dollars for state trunklines through 2025.

But these short-term investments are not nearly enough to get Michigan on the right track and they'll be gone before we know it. These investments fall well short of the needed \$44 billion of additional funding that Michigan needs over the next two decades. By only funding short-term fixes, we aren't making the necessary repairs to keep our roads in a good-working order for the long term. Instead, we continue to keep coming back every few years to fix the same problems over and over again.

It's clear that the way we've been funding Michigan's infrastructure over the past several decades does not work.

Michigan's leaders have the opportunity now to address this crisis head on and we look forward to working with them on this critical issue. It's time to develop an equitable, long-term, sustainable funding plan that will put Michigan drivers first and gets our roads back on the right track.

As Gov. Gretchen Whitmer begins her second term and new legislative majorities start their work at the Capitol, Michigan's leaders should finally tackle the big issue facing our entire state: fixing Michigan's roads by developing an equitable, long-term, sustainable funding plan.

The solution to our road funding problem is a long-term investment plan that would dedicate the necessary resources to fixing Michigan's roads and keep them in good working condition while acknowledging the modern technology drivers use. Without a plan that provides stable funding for Michigan's crumbling infrastructure, we continue kicking the can down the road while conditions only worsen.

Michigan has more than 120,000 miles of paved roadway and the cost to keep roads in good condition is significant. As of 2022,