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## EDITORIAL

# Lack of road money will cripple state

For three years, the Michigan Department of Transportation has warned that the state would lose a ton of federal loot if it could not put up its 20% local matching money.

Now, that day is heading toward us like a train. Unless the governor and Legislature act quickly, Michigan will lose half its transportation program over the next four years.

In a just-released draft of the state's next five-year transportation plan, MDOT anticipates a loss of \$2.1 billion in federal aid from 2010-14 because the state can't put up \$350 million in match money. Michigan's transportation spending will drop from \$1.4 billion this year to less than \$600 million for the fiscal year that starts Oct. 1. The state is set to kill 234 road and bridge projects over the next four years. The long-range picture is even grimmer: By 2020, the share of state roads in good condition will drop from 90% to 25%, said MDOT spokesman Bill Shreck.

"It's not going to be pretty," said Carmine Palombo of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. "You'll see messier right-of-ways, more congestion, and even more road and bridge pavement not getting fixed."

A bill just approved by the Senate Transportation Committee would raise the tax assessed on diesel fuel by 4 cents a gallon. It should be approved by the Legislature as soon as possible.

But solving the problem will take more than raising the diesel tax. It will take raising more money from state gasoline taxes, either by increasing the gas tax or replacing the per-gallon tax with a percentage tax on the wholesale price of fuel.

Getting either plan adopted will take more courage and foresight than Gov. Jennifer Granholm or state legislators have demonstrated, but it must become a top political priority. Michigan is already a serious donor state, and the prospect of losing billions more federal dollars -- taxes Michiganders have already paid -- should make every Michigan politician tremble. Such losses will not only dismantle a once-great highway system but also cost Michigan nearly 10,000 good-paying jobs a year.

Michigan last raised its gas tax -- by 4 cents, to 19 cents a gallon -- in 1997. Meantime, construction material costs have increased by double digits. A report released late last year by a task force in Lansing concluded that Michigan needs to double its transportation funding, to more than \$6 billion a year, just to keep roads and transit systems in good shape. Some county road commissions already leave snow unplowed and grass uncut. Battered roads cost drivers, on average, an added \$400 to \$500 a year.

That shouldn't sound like a nice ride to anyone.

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