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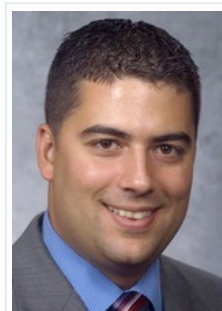
Opinion: Roads, highways and bridges are in dire need

By [Jared Rodriguez](#) for [Business Review](#)
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In 2008, [Regional Policy Conference](#) attendees voted to set a business agenda for the region. The outcome included a directive to "Update Funding Mechanisms for Transportation Infrastructure" as a critical measure for turning our economy around.

With this past winter being one of the worst in recent history for potholes, and the Farmers' Almanac saying 2010 is not looking any better, we need long-term investment now to prevent our roads from turning to gravel.

Unfortunately, the need to improve our roads is apparent to every citizen and visitor to this state. The RPC recognizes that the efficiency and quality of our state's transportation-infrastructure systems are critical to the health of Michigan's economic development, tourism, and interstate and intrastate commerce.



Rodriguez

Our roads consistently rank as some of the worst in the nation. Decades of underinvestment in maintenance and repair and the erosion of purchasing power brought on by inflation in construction costs have contributed to the crisis. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, Michigan has ranked among the bottom 10 states in per-capita state and local road funding for more than 40 years.

To compete now and in the future, we have to learn from states that are experiencing a robust uptick in their economy and hold many advantages over Michigan outside of road-funding disparities.

For example, it is no secret we are a peninsula and largely inconvenient for businesses to efficiently move their product to market. Michigan is not a well-traveled "through" state with easy access to the 80/90 East/West thoroughfare.

That being said, businesses looking to invest, expand or relocate to a region do look at a variety of factors when making critical business decisions. The overall tax burden, regulatory structure, ease of permitting processes, climate and access to land and water all play a role.

While we may lag behind in most categories, we have to be a leader in our infrastructure systems or we will continue to lose out on jobs and opportunities.

In addition to the business impact, our poor infrastructure system has inhibited our state's ability to attract talent. Often, new talent operates by seeking out a place to live first, then looks for a company for which to work. Some key characteristics attractive to the new generation of talent that we seek are the climate, urban-core centers, arts and culture, and a world-class transportation-infrastructure system at its foundation.

We have a lot of work ahead to reach world-class status. Current funding primarily consists of a flat fee added to each gallon of fuel purchased, which is insufficient, highly inelastic, and reactive to the health of the economy. Other

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