

State Representative
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House District 60

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From the Desk of Representative Cliff Bentz (R-Ontario)



Pavement or Gravel & Dust—You Decide

We are losing our paved streets and roads.

Between 20 and 50 percent of the streets and roads in many of our cities and counties are in “poor” or “very poor” condition. When asphalt reaches these conditions, it has to be replaced—at a cost of about \$200,000 to \$300,000 per mile, twice what it would have cost had it been appropriately cared for. Obviously, we should be preventing our roads and streets still in “good” and “fair” condition from transitioning into the “poor” category, but we are not. Instead, we are letting our good roads wear out (counties and cities are financially able to chip-coat only about a third of what they should maintain each year) while we fight the losing battle of patching patches on bad roads. Where are we going to find the \$200,000 to \$300,000 per mile to replace our hundreds of miles of roads already “lost”? Or, for that matter, the \$30,000 per mile it takes, every sixth or seventh year, to chip coat and preserve our good roads?

So, should we be paying more for the use of our roads? That discussion must start with an understanding of how much the average Oregonian now pays for that use. Fortunately, most of the tax that we pay at the pump to the government is transparent. For example, the cost of state gas tax, registration fees, and titles fees totals about 44.2 cents per gallon—30 cents of which is state gas tax. The average Oregon driver drives 10,234 miles per year, so if her car gets 20 miles per gallon, she pays about \$153.51 a year in state gas tax. If the state gas tax were to go up by one penny, she would pay about 43 cents more per month.

There are several other government organizations which raise money for roads, such as local road districts and the federal government, but the purpose of this editorial is to highlight two things: first, how much the average Oregonian pays in state gas tax, and second, despite what we are currently paying, our roads and bridges are failing. A future editorial will focus on the hidden and damaging impact Oregon carbon legislation is having and will have on the price of fuel and our ability to use the gas tax to save our transportation systems.

About half of any new state gas tax is sent back to Oregon's cities and counties. The other half goes to the Oregon Department of Transportation. This money is constitutionally dedicated to roads. Not to mass transit. Not to State Police. Not to any other non-road related use.

Three quarters, more or less, of the gas tax is paid by those on the West side of the state, so a large part of what is needed for maintenance of Eastern Oregon's state highways comes from the Willamette Valley. Said another way, the cost of maintaining the thousands of essential miles of state highway in Eastern Oregon vastly exceeds what we in Eastern Oregon pay in state gas tax. So, if you raise the gas tax or registration and title fees statewide, you are assuring that there will be money to bring from West to East to repair the state highways we use almost every day.

Every conversation about needing more money for road maintenance must address increases in the cost of road repair materials. For example, the cost of oil needed for asphalt has gone up, since just 2004, by almost 270 percent. Compare this 270 percent increase to the state gas tax, which, in 24 years was only raised once, by 6 cents (24 percent). Not only that, the cost of labor, gravel, and cement has also gone up by 50-75 percent.

As co-vice chair of the Interim Legislative Committee charged with addressing, in the 2017 legislative session set to begin in February, preservation of our road systems, what you think about these issues is important to me. If you think that we should continue to "use up" our roads and bridges, rather than paying necessary maintenance as we go, please tell me. Or, if you think that we should pay a higher gas tax, or higher registration or title fees, knowing that this money must be used for our roads and bridges, please say so. I need to hear from you.

(Space limitations here preclude discussion of the audit of ODOT's expenditures, seismic issues, and other necessary considerations. My Powerpoint on this topic, addressing many of these issues, can be viewed at:

<https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bentz/Documents/CitiesCountiesPresentation-onlineVersion.pdf>).

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Rep. Cliff Bentz (R-Ontario) is an Assistant Republican Leader in the House, and has served in the Oregon Legislative Assembly since 2008. In addition to his role as Vice-Chair of the Joint Committee on Transportation Preservation & Modernization, he is also the Vice-Chair of the Revenue Committee, and sits on the Transportation & Economic Development Committee, Energy and Environment Committee, the Joint Committee on Department of Energy Oversight, and the Legislative Counsel Committee, as well as on various work groups and task forces.