



April 6, 2021

Dear Elected State Policymaker:

With under 20 days remaining in the 67th Washington State Legislature's 2021 Regular Session, immediate action is essential to prevent any further destruction of state bridges, ferries and roads, over the next biennium, through a \$2 billion appropriation for vital maintenance and preservation.

While the present legislature has developed innovative transportation proposals of genuine merit, under the leadership of exceptional Transportation Committee chairs in each house, indispensable roadway infrastructure – long crumbling for lack of dollars required for “good repair” and today slouching towards actual collapse – must receive \$1 billion more, each year, to avoid catastrophe.

As the 100th anniversary of our state's early-and-expensive fuel excise tax nears, on July 1st, state policymakers understand that a \$2 billion appropriation to safeguard enormous investments made by state motorists, during a full century, to pay for the most costly and most valuable capital asset here – our state roadway system – will do nothing to resolve great harm from 25 years of chronic neglect of upkeep first publicly identified by state Transportation Secretary Roger Millar recently.

However, after improvidence by 13 predecessors, the 67th Legislature would **do no more harm**, if its additional funding arrests further rapid growth of the cascading disaster now worsening, exponentially, instead of doing more damage of its own with anything less than \$1 billion, annually, for repairs.

The upcoming centennial for immense state fuel taxes paid by nearly six million licensed drivers currently – and by millions before – is a good time to assess gigantic damage inflicted not simply on us, as state motorists, but on Washington's economy and on the global environment, during the last quarter century, through chronic neglect of basic prudence required for our huge investments.

As state policymakers' central focus has turned from developing the “built environment,” through construction and conservation of roadway infrastructure pioneered by the first Democrat elected as governor here in 1912, to protecting and to rehabilitating our “natural environment,” under an unbroken sequence of Democrats since a Republican governor was last elected in 1980, the verity that bridges, ferries and roads are “wasting” assets, needing constant maintenance, has also faded.

Much as past generations of state legislators appear to have lacked sufficient appreciation for the criticality and vulnerabilities of our state's wonderful natural environment, the last 13 legislatures have not apprehended the core-but-at-risk status of bridges, ferries and roads, as implicated by imposition of up-to-\$117 billion in financial harm on millions of drivers, to date, as is hereinafter documented.

Further lost is that Gov. Ernest Lister contracted with Pres. Woodrow Wilson's administration to obtain federal tax dollars required to be “spent only upon the highways comprising the system of state roads,” as a legal condition for receiving a progressive-era matching grant, and that the 15th Legislature then

formally approved the resulting statutory contract whereby “the good faith of the State of Washington is further pledged to maintain such roads and to make adequate provisions for carrying out such maintenance” (in Chapter 76, Sec. 4, Laws of 1917), with our state’s “good faith” re-pledged, with like verbiage, two years thereafter (in Chapter 69, Sec. 1, Laws of 1919).

Hence, our state legally committed to the federal government not only to maintain its “system of state roads,” but also “to make adequate provisions for carrying out such maintenance,” as partial consideration for federal matching funds so acquired, more-than-four years prior to collecting the first penny of state fuel taxes (and prior to further resulting fiduciary duties to protect state roads).

Adverse fiscal-and-physical consequences of our state’s disregard, or defiance, for its contractual-and-fiducial obligations, for 25 years, if not longer – despite formally pledging “the good faith of the State of Washington,” at least twice, to obtain federal funds under long-since-false pretenses – have imposed great harm on drivers, on economic prosperity and on environment sustainability, through gross negligence, *via* multiple causes increasing susceptibility of roads to disintegration.

The central role of roads throughout human history has not been a subject for intensive analyses, in academic-or-policymaking environs, and familiarity with transportation infrastructure appears often to engender a measure of contempt among many roadway users, without much focus on its import, except when a pivotal bridge falls down, literally, or is closed for some extended period.

Indeed, even the West Seattle Bridge’s shut-down has not caused local officials, there, to attend to the City of Seattle’s huge underfunding of its bridges for decades (except to pursue state aid).

Massive reliance on roads for personal mobility, for transport and delivery of goods and for vital receipt of fire, health, law-enforcement, mail and other paramount services, *inter alia*, has been repeatedly overlooked by policymakers, here and nationwide, as has the reality that foundational changes today disrupting commerce, through paradigm-shifting business models from Amazon to Convoy to DoorDash to Lyft to Uber and well beyond, are each highly and ever-more road dependent, with roadways serving drivers and nondrivers, alike, as has long been true for most transit usage.

Thus, destruction of the state road system through chronic neglect damages not only residents, as motorists, but it threatens future economic viability, statewide, and it must be stopped, therefore, before titanic fiscal-and-physical harm already inflicted, thereby, is made yet worse for everyone statewide.

Nor are thus-generated severe injuries limited to citizens, and to commerce, since degradation of the natural environment, here, also derives from failures to fund upkeep of our built environment.

Indeed, a substantial component for resolving global-warming perils, successfully, rests on major reductions in greenhouse gases available from timely roadway upkeep that preserves cement and steel and so avoids premature-and-unnecessary infrastructure replacements. In short, each ton of those energy-hog inputs required to produce concrete to replace a road currently – before gigantic energy needs can be supplied from a non-carbon source – pollutes far more than strategic delays in reconstruction, through prudent road conservation, until carbon-free energy can be substituted.

What is beyond reasonable dispute is that extended neglect by state policymakers, here, to finance “good repair” of our state road network, for 25 years, has much worsened GHG damage by thus repeatedly

forcing early replacements for state bridges, ferries and roads, needlessly, that not only yield citizen-and-economic losses, but that also unnecessarily imperil the environment worldwide.

What is less certain is why this issue is not more widely understood by environmental groups that conflate vehicle pollution with roads upon which buses, cars, trucks and other vehicles run – and why few are vocal advocates for the crying need to preserve and to maintain state roads here – as well as why foundations and other organizations intent on reversing global warming, and adverse consequences thereof, do not focus on major contributions that preservation can thereby provide.

However, no speculation is required either to quantify truly gargantuan damage that our state has done – and is doing – to citizens, to economic success and to environmental sustainability, or else to document that failure by the 67th Legislature to appropriate \$2 billion, for the coming 2021-23 biennium, in fact causes \$6-to-\$10 billion more fiscal harm to current-and-future drivers, at least, since costs for replacing roads, prematurely, are three-to-five times higher than for “good repair.”

Application of third-grade arithmetic to Secretary Millar’s identification of \$1 billion per year as our state’s underfunding for maintenance and preservation of its bridges, ferries and roads, today, and to his 25-year period, for chronic neglect, after his recent analysis – in the most conservative fashion reasonable based upon even growth from no deficiency, in 1995, to \$1 billion, for 2020 – yields a \$13 billion pothole, to this date, even if the 67th Legislature now appropriates \$2 billion.

Thus, transportation engineers’ standard three-to-five-times multiplier identifies the 54th-to-66th Washington State Legislatures’ financial harm to state motorists and to state businesses, already, at \$39 billion to \$65 billion (rising to \$45 billion to \$75 billion should the 67th Legislature fail to appropriate \$2 billion, more, for quintessential maintenance-and-preservation costs in 2021-23).

Also, Secretary Millar has repeatedly indicated that state failures to pay for “good repair” for our state roadway system create needless repair costs of \$656, per driver, per year. Hence, nearly \$4 billion in costs, for unnecessary state-caused damage to *circa* three million vehicles, shall be suffered by almost six million licensed drivers, in 2021, with another such total waste next year.

Using the same conservative methodology stated above, and again applying it to a 25-year period of underfunding identified by Secretary Millar, this second pothole is at *circa* \$52 billion thus far, plus \$4 billion per year for some years more, even if the 67th Legislature appropriates \$2 billion.

Further, Secretary Millar has repeatedly indicated that state failures to finance “good repair” are contributing factors to “Congestion” costs of \$4.5 billion each year (as “based on value of travel delay and excess fuel consumption”), to “Safety” costs of \$14.7 billion each year (for “Societal costs of crashes” from Federal Highway Administration data) and to “Green House Gas” costs of \$2.1 billion each year (from a 2015 Washington State Department of Ecology “GHG Inventory”).

Even if these last three categories are held in abeyance – until each can be understood more fully after careful analyses for them warranted following Secretary Millar’s recent presentations – the \$91 billion to \$117 billion in costs being created by our state’s chronic neglect of maintenance-and-preservation needs of state bridges, ferries and roads, comprising our state roadway system, and constituting our most value capital asset, are genuinely staggering numbers for our medium-sized state’s user-fee-paying motorists, from just 25 years of neglect, especially after 100 years of state drivers having paid one of the highest state fuel taxes in the nation, here, and particularly since a failure by the 67th Legislature to provide \$2

billion for essential “good repair,” during the 2021 biennium, shall escalate this huge overhang to \$97 billion to \$127 billion within two years, and since this exponential growth will continue to compound, inexorably, until some legislature acts.

Yet, such dire figures likely understate the peril’s full damning fiscal dimensions given two Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee investigations determining that our state’s Department of Transportation “could not reliably estimate its funding needs for preserving the state’s bridge network” (in 2015) and that “WSDOT continues to communicate an incomplete picture of its long-term bridge preservation needs,” such that drivers “may have an unrealistically low impression of long-term costs based on WSDOT’s recent reports,” in a rather scathing follow-up review, which again documented one core bridge assessment-and-monitoring deficiency after another (in 2019).

While transportation engineers’ three-to-five-times heuristic yields a range for our state’s chronic underfunding for conserving the state roadway system that is broader than might be desired, such less-than-ideal mechanism evidences the exponential nature of the dangers being created by state policymakers’ failures to provide necessary-and-sufficient funding, during a quarter century, and counting, as the 67th Legislature determines, in just under three weeks, whether it shall continue to kick an already very badly dented can down an increasingly cratered, and cratering, road for yet another session, or whether a majority of its members shall, at last, act to **do no more harm**, by ending great ills already visited on nearly six million licensed drivers – most of voting age – who will pay for the lack of “good repair,” three to five times over, while also wasting \$4 billion, per year, for needless vehicle repairs, due to legislative failures to appropriate \$1 billion annually.

If the Washington State Good Roads and Transportation Association can assist you in protecting state residents, our state’s economic future and the state-and-global environment, then please do contact me, since urgent preservation-and-maintenance needs are the organization’s core focus in our 122nd year of efforts on behalf of all multimodal transportation reliant on good roads here.

Respectfully yours,

Will Knedlik, President