

Many Bridges In Dire Straits

Staff

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Michigan Contractor and Builder

While elected leaders and other honored guests gather in Mackinaw City recently to celebrate the 50th birthday of the Mackinac Bridge, Michigan's greatest bridge, the tell-tale signs of aging and neglect have left many of the state's lesser-known spans in dire straits.

The Michigan Infrastructure & Transportation Association (MITA) recently released the state's list of over 200 serious or critical bridges. Earlier this year, **The Road Information Program (TRIP)** out of Washington reported that Michigan ranks among the top 10 nationally for unsafe bridges. The TRIP report estimated that 28 percent of Michigan's bridges are either structurally deficient or functionally obsolete. This directly impacts safety and mobility due to weight restrictions, narrow lanes and other correctible factors.

"We all recognize the Mackinac Bridge as one of the world's great engineering marvels and as a well-recognized icon of our state," said Mike Nystrom, vice-president of government and public relations for MITA and co-chair of Michigan's Transportation Team.

"Unfortunately, crumbling bridges and deteriorated roads are fast becoming another far less flattering symbol of our state."

Nystrom said that the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) is spending state road and bridge money as

efficiently as possible and is a national leader in utilizing the latest technologies. However, the fact remains that many of the state's bridges have been in existence for 50 years or longer, and we do not have the money necessary to repair or replace them.

Nystrom urged elected leaders to use the occasion to garner support for MITA's comprehensive plan for a dedicated and sustainable funding stream to make roads and bridges throughout Michigan safer, repair deteriorating streets and relieve traffic congestion in rapidly growing communities.

The plan would increase the state's gasoline tax 3 cents per year for three years. By 2010, the state's gas tax would be 28 cents per gallon — the same rate as neighboring Ohio. A 9-cent gas tax phased in over three years represents little more than an inflationary increase since the last time the gas tax was raised 10 years ago. Currently, Michigan's gas tax is tied for 30th in the nation. In addition to gas and diesel tax increases, the plan also includes a small hike in the vehicle registration fee.

With the estimated cost to reconstruct a bridge between \$1.2 million and \$1.8 million, Michigan could rebuild between 55 and 80 spans with an additional \$100 million in funding or repair up to 200 bridges at a cost of \$500,000 to \$700,000 each for the same amount.