

For immediate release

Wednesday, April 15, 2009

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STIMULUS MONEY ALONE NOT ADEQUATE FOR ROADS, BRIDGES

Bismarck, N.D., April 15, 2009 – The federal stimulus package will provide a welcome down payment toward meeting North Dakota’s funding shortfall for projects to address the deficiencies on its roads, highways and bridges, but will not be adequate to allow the state to proceed with numerous projects needed to modernize its surface transportation system and allow for long-term economic development.

According to a new TRIP report, “Moving into North Dakota’s Future: Meeting the State’s Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility,” the state has a significant level of deficiencies on its roads, highways and bridges, and an insufficient amount of transportation funds to keep pace with needed repairs, expansion and maintenance. North Dakota will require increased, long-term funding for repairs to improve the condition and safety of its transportation system.

Barnes County Commissioner Cindy Schwehr, who is President of the ND County Commissioners Association, says, “Transportation funding for local roads and bridges has not kept pace with inflation, and it is really beginning to show. The federal stimulus package is a good start, but North Dakota needs to make a long term commitment, starting now, to catch up on long-overdue improvements.”

While the approximately \$170 million in stimulus funding will allow North Dakota to make needed improvements to its roads and bridges, the state still faces a sizeable transportation funding shortfall in the long-term. The amount needed strictly to maintain the state and local road and bridge system is \$254 million per year greater than the amount of funding available. Meeting North Dakota’s need to modernize and maintain its system of roads, highways and bridges will require a significant, long-term boost in transportation funding at the federal, state and local level.

According to the TRIP report, one quarter of the state’s roads are deficient, with five percent rated in poor condition and an additional 20 percent in mediocre condition. TRIP estimates that roads in need of repair cost each North Dakota motorist an average of \$238 annually in extra vehicle operation costs - \$111 million statewide. These costs include

accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs, and increased fuel consumption and tire wear.

A total of 22 percent of North Dakota's bridges are deficient. Sixteen percent of the state's bridges (20 feet or longer) were rated as structurally deficient, while six percent were rated functionally obsolete. A bridge is structurally deficient if there is a condition that warrants attention on the deck, superstructure, or substructure of the bridge. Functionally obsolete bridges no longer meet modern design standards for safety features such as lane widths or alignment with connecting roads, or are no longer adequate to serve the volume of traffic being carried.

The TRIP report also found that North Dakota has averaged 110 traffic deaths annually from 2004 to 2008, and the rate of traffic fatalities in North Dakota in 2007 – 1.42 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel – was higher than the national average of 1.36.

“We're no longer talking about simply enjoying a nice, smooth ride,” states Mark Johnson, Executive Director of the ND Association of Counties, “in all parts of the state, the safety of county bridges has reached a critical level, and roads are deteriorating rapidly. This report clearly shows that we can't wait any longer to do something about it.”

The federal surface transportation program remains a critical source of funding for road and bridge repairs in North Dakota, the report found. From 1998 to 2007, North Dakota received \$2.24 billion in federal funding for road, highway and bridge improvements, 50 percent of revenues used annually by the North Dakota Department of Transportation to pay for road, highway and bridge construction, repairs and maintenance, the report found.

The current federal transportation program expires on September 30, 2009, requiring Congress to authorize a new federal surface transportation program or extend the current program to allow federal highway dollars to continue to be provided to North Dakota.

“North Dakota has benefited tremendously from the federal transportation program,” said William M. Wilkins, executive director of TRIP. “It is critical to the state's economic well-being that approval of the federal stimulus package is followed by timely and adequately funded authorization of a new federal surface transportation program in 2009.”