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## **Editorial: Efficient roads, or bust**

### **Nevada's economy will tank if bill is not passed to fund needed road construction**

Business and transportation leaders made it clear to a Senate committee Tuesday that they want to keep Nevada' highways flowing with tourists, commuters, shoppers, service providers and the trucks that supply most of our goods.

Without the efficient flow of traffic, the state economy could come to a near standstill. Those appearing before the Senate Taxation Committee understood that and requested action from the Legislature to prevent gridlock from happening.

Their concern was rooted in Nevada's \$3.8 billion deficit for road construction and repairs over the next decade. Unless the state develops a plan for overcoming that shortfall, its major highways and roads will experience severe and consistent blockages, consequently throwing the economy into a tailspin.

This looming scenario was first illuminated by the Nevada Transportation Department two years ago. Then-Gov. Kenny Guinn appointed a blue-ribbon task force to double-check the department's projections. After a year's study the task force verified them and recommended a variety of tax and fee increases.

In both the Senate and Assembly, bills are progressing that address the dire need for new sources of revenue.

The Republican effort, Senate Bill 324, relies primarily on increasing the state gasoline tax and raising fees for car registrations and driver's licenses. Also under this bill, instead of depositing sales-tax receipts from automobile repairs and sales into the general fund, the receipts would go toward roads.

And Democrats are working on Assembly Bill 505, which is scheduled for more discussion today. They will also consider tax and fee increases, although the gasoline tax would remain where it is at 17.65 cents a gallon. Central to their plan is a "weight-distance" tax on commercial trucks, meaning the tax would depend on the weight of the truck and how far it was traveling within the state.

Leaders of the Senate and Assembly have agreed to form a working group to reach consensus on a bill this session. Both plans envision using the money from the new fees and taxes to finance long-term bond issues that would pay for the needed construction.

With the Legislature seemingly committed, the only stumbling block appears to be Gov. Jim Gibbons, who has vowed to veto any bill that raises taxes or fees. If he carries through with this threat that is based on ideology rather than reality, he will deservedly be remembered as the Gridlock Governor.

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