

Washington State Association of County Engineers Legislative Priorities 2021-2023

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WSACE recently commissioned a study regarding the ability of current County revenue sources to support County transportation system needs. The conclusions are concerning.

“Without changes, counties will be unable to invest fully in roadway and bridge preservation, fish passage barrier removal, ADA access, safety, and active transportation. Deferred maintenance will grow, leading to deteriorating road conditions, potential safety hazards, and escalating catch-up costs.”

“As an order of magnitude estimate, total road deferred maintenance costs for all counties are roughly between \$4.7 billion and \$6.3 billion—around five to six times total annual transportation expenditures across all counties.”

Source: BERK, 2020

Therefore, counties propose the following:

Prioritize Preservation and Maintenance Activities and Programs

Counties believe the maintenance and preservation of our transportation system should be the foremost priority of transportation investments statewide.

Road Fund Levy Shifts and Diversions

The Legislature needs to address state unfunded mandates impacting the County's General Fund to alleviate the resulting dependence on County Road Fund shifts and diversions.

Fish Barrier Removal Projects

Counties support funding a comprehensive and coordinated statewide program; prioritizing both watersheds and species to determine the removal of state, local, and private barriers to maximize habitat recovery.

Increase State Shared Revenue

The county share of state gas tax allocations has declined significantly over the past two decades. Since 1999 the state gas tax has more than doubled, going from 23 cents to 49 cents, but direct fuel tax distributions to Counties have not kept pace – increasing only 1/2 cent in that same period.

Increases to the state gas tax have been almost wholly dedicated toward specific state projects, with very little investment to counties.

Targeted Increases to the Rural Arterial Program (RAP) and County Arterial Preservation Program (CAPP)

The RAP and CAPP programs provide valuable revenues to county road programs through efficient and transparent means.

Federal Fund Exchange Program

The Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) funds critical preservation and maintenance activities counties desperately need. However, federal funds often come with added red-tape, resulting in heftier price-tags and longer timelines.

A federal fund exchange or “swap” is quite simple. Counties would be allowed to swap their sub-allocation of federal-aid highway funds for state transportation funds.

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