



What others say

"WRDA calls for necessary improvements to ensure our farmers and manufacturers are able to compete in a global market in the future. I visited Brazil and saw the investment Brazil is putting into its infrastructure on the Amazon River. Unless we update the locks and dams on our own rivers, we will see higher input costs and fewer markets for our commodities."
Sen. Charles Grassley

"Having a first-rate river transportation system is a big key if the U.S. is to stay competitive in world markets. Our locks and dams need major repair, and they must be expanded so we can competitively market U.S. grain and other goods to the world."
**Craig Lang,
Iowa Farm Bureau**

"WRDA is absolutely crucial to farmers who depend on the inland waterway system to deliver their crops to the global market and to businesses who rely on the river system to move raw materials and products. Today, our infrastructure can't keep pace with current demands and it is falling apart."
**Ron Litterer,
NCGA**

and others at ISU developed and tested. During the 1990s, Wisner worked with crop insurance industry leaders to educate agents and farmers about the benefits of integrating two risk-management tools: forward pricing and harvest-price revenue insurance.

He has written extensively on the marketing of genetically modified crops.

ISU has been recruiting candidates with expertise in grain marketing. The plan is to bring candidates from this national search to campus in early 2008 and have someone in place by summer.

Wisner, after a few months break, plans to do some work for the Ag Marketing Resource Center on the ISU campus.

Thompson is communications specialist for the College of Ag and Life Sciences at ISU.

Wanted: road repair

By ROD SWOBODA

A NUMBER of Iowans say they wouldn't mind paying a little more at the pump each time they fill their tanks if they could be guaranteed that an increase in the gas tax would go to improving roads and bridges.

In a poll conducted by the Iowa Good Roads Association in August, 48.3% of respondents said they would favor increasing Iowa's gas tax. However, when informed that Iowa's gas tax is constitutionally guaranteed to be spent on roads, respondents overwhelmingly (81.7%) said they support a gas tax increase.

Dave Scott, executive director, Good Roads Association, says even with current high gas prices, he wasn't surprised.

"Iowans have historically supported funding our road system even in tough times," says Scott. He points out the Iowa Legislature increased the gas tax nine out of 10 years in the 1980s when Iowa's economy was being hit by some of the most difficult economic times of the previous 40 years.

The Legislature hasn't passed a gas tax increase since 1989. An Iowa Department of Transportation study shows the state, cities and counties have lost nearly 75% of their buying power due to increased costs since 1989. This marks the longest period of time the state has gone without an increase in the gas tax since between the Great Depression and World War II.

Support gas tax increase

The poll asked Iowans how large a gas tax increase they would support. More than 83% said they would support a modest gas tax increase of 1 to 3 cents, and 23% would go as high as 4 to 7 cents. A 1-cent increase in the gas tax would raise about \$22 million.

The poll also asked how Iowans would like to see any extra money in the state budget spent. By a 2-to-1 margin, Iowans favor spending "extra" budget dollars on fixing roads and bridges over increasing teacher salaries or tax relief.



NEED FIXING: A new poll shows Iowans want to see more state spending on repair and replacement of roads and bridges.

Key Points

- Most Iowans support higher gas tax to fix roads, bridges.
- Study shows a \$200 million shortfall in road/bridge funding.
- Legislature will review funding sources for improvement.

The poll shows 36.7% support spending the money on roads and bridges, compared to 18.6% for teacher salaries and 18.8% for tax relief.

Using extra state money for financial incentives for new businesses to locate in Iowa is favored by only 15.2%. Another 9.3% want to see the money used on state parks and trails. Just 1% list other priorities.

"When twice as many Iowans tell you they'd rather see extra money go into our road system as they would into their own pocket, it sends a strong message Iowans want to see roads and bridges maintained safely and efficiently," says Scott.

The poll was conducted just after the big bridge collapse in Minneapolis this past summer. It was conducted just prior to the start of meetings of an interim study committee of the Iowa Legislature that is reviewing various ways to fund a transportation program passed in the last legislative session.

A study provided to the Iowa Legislature by the Iowa DOT shows a \$200 million annual shortfall in Iowa's road and bridge funding.

One of the most significant funding sources to be dis-

cussed by the Iowa legislative committee, outside of the gas tax, is the registration fee paid by Iowa pickup truck drivers.

Fees for pickup trucks

Owners of cars, vans and sport utility vehicles can pay registration fees up to several hundred dollars because costs are calculated based on weight, age and value. Pickups, on the other hand, pay a flat fee of \$65. According to the poll, 80.3% of Iowans think the fee on pickups should be increased to match those of vehicles of similar weight, value and age.

Iowa DOT records show pickup truck registrations are 25% of those of other vehicles. Matching the formula on pickups to those of other vehicles would generate an extra \$54 million for roads and bridges.

The Iowa legislative study committee will deliver its recommendations to the Iowa Legislature in January. In all likelihood, says state Sen. Tom Reilly, D-Oskaloosa, and co-chairman of the study committee, the team will recommend a motor fuel tax increase and changes in the state fee to register most pickup trucks.

"A 5-cent-per-gallon rise would cover most of the \$200 million, and the change in

Iowans open to a tax hike

THE head of the Iowa Good Roads Association, David Scott, believes the overwhelming support for a state tax increase to fix roads and bridges, as shown by a recent poll, is nearly unprecedented.

"Last year, the Legislature passed a \$1 per pack tax increase on cigarettes when polling showed just 65% of Iowans supported the tax increase and only about 20% of Iowans smoke," says Scott. "Agreeing to tax the 'other guy' is not surprising, but this poll shows even more Iowans are willing to tax themselves to support bridges and roads than there were Iowans willing to increase the tax on cigarette smokers."

Scott commends the Iowa Legislature and Gov. Culver for having the foresight to pass legislation last session creating a new highway fund and establishing an interim committee to investigate funding alternatives for the 2008 Legislature to consider.

pickup registrations would take care of most of the rest," he says. "We tried to look for ways to minimize the impact on everyone."

A gas tax increase would be among the fairest methods of raising money, he says. While Iowa drivers would pay a higher cost for fuel, out-of-state motorists who travel through the state would also pay. One estimate puts that amount at about 15% of the total raised from an increase in the fuel tax.

A 2006 report by the Iowa DOT says the state is on the verge of a transportation crisis due to skyrocketing construction costs, aging roads and bridges, and maintenance that has been put off for too long.

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POSTMASTER: Please send address corrections to *Wallaces Farmer*, 191 S. Gary Ave., Carol Stream IL 60188

Read more of the poll results

THE Iowa Good Roads Association is a statewide organization comprised of businesses, industries and individuals supportive of maintaining a safe and efficient road system that is vital to economic development in Iowa and to the safety and well-being of all Iowans.

A copy of the poll is available online at www.iaenr.org/IGRA-RoadFundingPoll.pdf.

The poll has a margin of error of +3.8% and was conducted by Victory Enterprises in Davenport, Iowa. For more information, call David Scott, executive director of the Good Roads Association, at 515-284-7410 or e-mail dave.scott@igra.org.