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Legislature Enacts Bills Related To Turnpike, New Road Funding Options For Counties

(Editor's Note: Provided is a March 17, 2010 article by The Associated Press.)

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- A pair of bills on Gov. Joe Manchin's desk could change the way road work is paid for in West Virginia, with new tolls and local bonds part of a mix aimed at replacing faltering gas tax revenues.

The Legislature passed the two measures during the 60-day session that ended Saturday, with the toll measure among Manchin's agenda items. The governor wants West Virginia Turnpike's parent agency to erect booths on certain roads to pay for building or expanding them. The other measure, which originated in the Senate, would give counties a variety of funding tools to help pay for road construction, including user fees and bonds. Its backers say this would mark a major shift, since counties haven't been responsible for road work in West Virginia since the Great Depression.

"This changes the mentality of West Virginia, where you have a dependency culture," said Sen. John Unger, D-Berkeley, the bill's lead sponsor. "You're saying to the counties, you can't just wait for pennies from heaven," he said. "Roads aren't going to be something that has to be done by the state or the federal government."

State government maintains 92 percent of the roads found within West Virginia's borders, making it the sixth-largest road system by mileage in the U.S.

Tom Witt, director of West Virginia University's Bureau of Business and Economic Research, told lawmakers last year that only three other states have such a centralized system for operating and financing roads.

Under Unger's bill, counties would have to get voter approval before issuing bonds. One of the advantages, he said, is it would find funding sources for road projects outside the State Road Fund.

West Virginia's State Road Fund pays for highway building, maintenance and repair. Its main revenue sources -- taxes on fuel, vehicle sales and related registrations -- have stagnated this decade because of improved fuel efficiency, occasional gas price spikes, the economic downturn and other factors. But the cost of key materials, asphalt and concrete, have risen.

Manchin hasn't said yet if he'll sign both bills. A call to his office was not immediately returned Tuesday.

Even if he does sign the measures into law, they may not make a significant dent in West Virginia's long-term needs, according to Joe Deneault, chairman of West Virginians for Better Transportation. "I would hate for people to go away from this year's session thinking we solved all our transportation problems," he said.

Deneault's group says there are extensive maintenance problems with old, crumbling roads as well as a need for new construction. A study the group commissioned last year estimates that rough roads cost each motorist an average of \$280 annually in extra vehicle operating costs.

Tolls only make sense for busy, well-traveled roads, Deneault said, and have limited use elsewhere in the state. And Unger's bill requires voter approval, which is a complicated process with an uncertain outcome.

"These two bills are good steps, but they're steps around the edge instead of jumping into the middle of the statewide problem," he said.

2010 Construction EXPO To Provide Seminar On Future Of State's Transportation Projects

The 31st Annual WV Construction & Design Exposition will be held next week (March 24-25) at the Charleston Civic Center, and the event will offer attendees with a wide range of seminars and exhibitors. In particular, there will be a seminar presentation on the morning of March 24 that will provide information about the future of West Virginia's transportation projects (see below).

The two-day event is open to all interested persons, and there is no charge to attend. But, pre-registration is strongly recommended. To pre-register, please [click here](#).

Approximately 6,000 people from across the United States came to EXPO 2009 to see new products, talk to knowledgeable exhibitors and attend valuable seminars -- most offer continuing education credit.

For more information, please go to: www.wvexpo.com.

02 WVDOH Program: A Preview of the Next Six Years

Sponsored by the Contractors Association of West Virginia (CAWV) and West Virginians for Better Transportation (WVBT).

Presented by Robert L. Pennington, PE and Anthony J. Carovillano, PE - WVDOT Program Planning & Administration Division.

The WVDOH recently updated its Six Year Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (2010-2015 STIP) which includes all planned federally funded surface transportation projects in the state. As a part of the STIP, the WVDOH highway program has recently seen an increase in funding from the recent American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The presentation will include a preview of planned projects and programs for the next six years. The presentation will also address the WVDOH's implementation of the project scheduling software Primavera into the management of projects in the planning, design, and construction phases of the project. The presentation will address the current status and goals for implementation.

Information: Robert L. Pennington, PE 304-558-3113 Robert.Pennington@wv.gov

Location: Civic Center Parlor A
Date ~ Time: 03/24/2010 ~ 08:30 AM to 09:30 AM
Fee: \$0.00

FINAL WEEK -- REGISTER TO WIN!
Special WVBT-EXPO Contest: Enter To Win An HDTV!



West Virginians for Better Transportation once again will give away a flat-screen HDTV to one lucky winner who is present at the 2010 West Virginia Construction and Design Exposition's EXPO. The drawing will take place during the EXPO's After Hours event on March 24, 2010, from 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm at the Charleston Civic Center.

You must be at least 18 years of age and be present at the EXPO After Hours event on March 24, 2010 in order to win. Please read all rules before entering the drawing.

TWO WAYS TO ENTER:

1. Complete this on-line form: <http://www.keepwvmoving.org/getactive/hdtv.aspx>
2. Drop by the WVBT exhibit booth on the first day of EXPO to get an entry form.

The HDTV drawing is sponsored by The Manahan Group, Malone Consulting Services and Advantage Technology.

Help Support WVBT's Ongoing Efforts In 2010

Now more than ever WVBT needs financial support from coalition partners and companies. If your organization or company would like to help sustain the coalition's ongoing campaign or would like to get more information about West Virginians for Better Transportation, please send an email to info@keepwvmoving.org. Someone would be happy to contact you.

Remember -- even with recent successes, West Virginia still has massive unmet needs (\$2 billion) for bridge, roadway and highway maintenance and construction.

Need A Speaker?

If you would like to have a speaker come talk about transportation to your group or organization, please complete this request form:

http://www.keepwvmoving.org/getactive/request_a_wvbt_speaker.aspx

For more information about West Virginians for Better Transportation, please go to www.keepwvmoving.org.

To opt out of this email system, please send your request to info@keepwvmoving.org.