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## **Roadwork Blossoms Across W.Va.** ***This year's crop is larger than normal because of an influx of federal funds***

*(Editor's Note: Provided is a reprint of an article that was published in the April 28, 2010 edition of the Charleston Daily Mail. WVBT continues to spread the word that more needs to be done to respond to the state's transportation needs.)*

CHARLESTON, W.Va.--It's another spring and once again, orange construction barrels have sprung up like wildflowers along West Virginia's highways. But this year's crop is more conspicuous because of a surge of federal stimulus dollars.

Lots of money is poured into maintaining and improving the state's roads. But advocates for better roads say it's never enough. The state Division of Highways spends more than \$1 billion annually to build, rehabilitate and maintain roads and bridges.

Year after year, the never-ending challenge of maintaining 36,000 miles of roads and 6,700 bridges is the largest expense. As the division's 2009 annual financial report pointed out, more than one third of the state's bridges are either structurally deficient or functionally obsolete, although all are deemed safe.

Most of the state's money for highways - about \$650 million - comes from the State Road Fund. About \$460 million comes from the federal government. Division of Highways spokesman Brent Walker said last year's budget got a \$210.8 million boost in the form of federal stimulus money.

Walker said bridge and overpass work under way every 10 miles or so on Interstate 77 between Charleston and the Ohio border is typical.

"There's certainly a lot of paving, a lot of overpass and bridge-deck replacement work," he said. "It's happening on the interstates and primary roads and on some of our secondary roads."

Stimulus dollars have helped significantly, he said. "Across the board, year-in and year-out, there will be projects that just aren't funded without some additional assistance," he said. "So when you have a stimulus program, it allows us to fund those much-needed projects. The preservation and maintenance of our existing facilities was one of the primary focuses with the stimulus money, with particular attention to our bridges - which

means cleaning and painting and, in some cases, replacing decks and in other cases, replacing bridges.

"We've also used stimulus funding for paving, to fill in some gaps, to continue to keep our paving program up to where it's been the last couple of years - around \$100 million," he said.

"We practice triage here," Walker said. "We take a look at what we have and try to utilize what we've been given, based on needs. But there are so many needs."

West Virginia Turnpike officials are using nearly \$5 million in federal stimulus funds to improve safety on the 88-mile toll road.

The projects include replacing overhead message boards, building four emergency gates and installing closed circuit television cameras along the Charleston-to-Princeton highway.

Combined, the stimulus-funded projects will cost about as much as a planned upgrade of the Turnpike's toll system.

General Manager Greg Barr says it would be difficult to do all the upgrades needed without the stimulus money.

**The maintenance and improvements on West Virginia's highways still fall short of what is needed, said Joe Deneault, treasurer of West Virginians for Better Transportation. "We recognize the Division of Highways is doing a lot with what they have, but the needs far outpace the resources," Deneault said.**

**West Virginians for Better Transportation is a group made up of industry contractors and other interested parties.**

**"At various times the Division of Highways has indicated the need for up to about \$800 million of additional funding annually," Deneault said. "While the stimulus funds have helped a little bit, they can only be directed to the federal highway system, which only makes up about one third of the highway system in West Virginia. So the roads people use to get from their home to the main roads - those roads' needs are largely unmet except for very routine maintenance.**

**"At one point the Division of Highways looked at about 170 projects that had been proposed over the years, costing about \$20 billion," Deneault said.**

Some examples included upgrading W.Va. 2 to four lanes from Parkersburg to Moundsville, extending Interstate 68 east from Morgantown to Moundsville, and providing four-lane access to Webster Springs.

"Any part of the state you go to, there are projects local people feel are vital to their economic future," he said. "The Division of Highways will only be able to do a very small percentage of those projects in the next 25 years."

Walker said that when federal stimulus money was offered, West Virginia was one of the most prepared states "because we have a lot of 'shovel-ready' projects. Other states might have had to dust off projects. We didn't."

It is not yet clear whether the federal government will offer a second round of stimulus money. Walker said if there is another round, West Virginia will be ready. "Our thought is, if there is additional money, we'll just throw it into our regular program," he said.

Some projects that are funded with federal stimulus money have signs posted that note the source of financing, like the Country Route 25-Interstate 77 overpass work now under way in Wood County. But the signs aren't required and sometimes they aren't displayed when projects use a blend of financing.

In addition to its regular programs, state Secretary of Transportation Paul Mattox created a special \$12 million program to repair damage caused by the winter weather. "The money was set aside from the State Road Fund to go to the 10 highway districts, to be divided proportionately based on state-maintained road miles," Walker said.

A lot of the money is being spent to repair potholes. But instead of shoveling a cold mix of asphalt into a hole, the division is often using a skid steer with a milling attachment on the front. "The traveling public will see little squares on the roads," Walker said. "The milling attachment mills out a square area. We come in behind it and pour in the asphalt and then roll it. It's a more permanent fix."

The result of this work can be seen in Charleston along Kanawha Boulevard near the Moose Club. Also, a crew used the method to repair Hillcrest Drive.

Although construction barrels seem to have sprouted everywhere, the Division of Highways is struggling to keep up with needs. That's because the division's biggest source of revenue, the State Road Fund, is shrinking. The fund's revenues come primarily from the purchase and use of motor fuel, motor vehicle fees, and the sales tax on consumer purchases of motor vehicles.

Motor fuel excise tax collections dropped nearly 1 percent, from \$395.6 million in 2008 to \$391.9 million last year. Automobile privilege tax collections fell 16 percent, from \$169 million to \$141.9 million.

The state is expected to slowly recover from the recession. As a result, motor fuel consumption is predicted to be flat for several years as motorists drive fewer miles and purchase more fuel-efficient vehicles. Also, automobile privilege tax collections are expected to remain lower as motorists buy less expensive vehicles or keep their current vehicles longer.

In its 2009 annual report, the division said, "**Unless the State Road Fund is able to substantially increase its revenues, the long-term forecast is for reduced construction and maintenance, accompanied by a decline in the condition of the state's highway infrastructure and a negative impact on the overall economic condition of the state.**"

## **Help Support WVBT's Ongoing Efforts In 2010**

**Now more than ever WVBT needs financial contributions 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](mailto: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?**

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For more information about West Virginians for Better Transportation, please go to [www.keepwvmoving.org](http://www.keepwvmoving.org).

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