

A problem we can't ignore any longer

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In recent weeks we've been writing news stories about the [sorry state of our roads, bridges and other infrastructure](#) – both locally and statewide.

We got more anecdotal evidence of how dire the problem is last week. On Thanksgiving, Reedsport public works crews spent the day not at the dinner table, but [laboring to fix busted water mains](#). That's no way for anyone to spend a holiday weekend.

The fact that our roads and water systems need attention is no revelation to anyone, but the still unanswered question is how to pay the repair bill. We're talking about billions of dollars just in Oregon.

There is no viable alternative. We're going to pay for crumbling infrastructure in one way or another. Oregon motorists currently enjoy a relatively low cost of vehicle ownership — what it costs in fuel, maintenance, etc. But that won't last as roads get worse and start beating up vehicles at a faster rate.

Same goes for aging water and wastewater systems. They end up costing us more when some vital system suddenly fails at the most inopportune times and we pay higher call out wages to repair crews.

We already have a pretty good idea of what things need to be fixed. Engineers have already surveyed the landscape and can produce long lists of projects that need to be undertaken. They've already figured out what the bill might be.

So, two things need to happen.

First, we'd like to see the state legislature this session allocate more funds to infrastructure needs. State budget analysts suggest the state's overall economic recovery should generate an additional \$1.8 billion for the next two-year budget. While [Gov. John Kitzhaber has proposed increases in education funding](#), we think that he and lawmakers should

also consider shifting more funds to the transportation department.

Second, taxpayers need to accept reality. The identified, itemized needs are already outlined. We know the work that needs to be done and what the cost estimates are. For those kinds of projects, we all should be willing to dig a little deeper and pay the bill now.

If we don't, we'll end up paying much more down the potholed road.