

## Loss of highway funding would hurt Kansas

By Ray LaHood and Ed Rendell  
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If you tried to survive today on the compensation you received 20 years ago, you would be facing dire economic hardships. Inflation affects all sectors of the economy, yet America's gas tax has not yet caught up to this reality.

Since 1993, the gas tax has been firmly set at 18.4 cents per gallon. In inflation-adjusted terms, the gas tax has lost a third of its purchasing power and is worth only 11.5 cents today.

This is important because the federal gas tax is the only revenue source for the Highway Trust Fund, which maintains our nation's roads and bridges.

This means that in Kansas, road maintenance and new construction projects could face immediate delays or cancellations, which would only further complicate traffic congestion on busy thoroughfares such as I-235 in Wichita.

Over the past 21 years, cars have become much more fuel-efficient, and hybrids and electric vehicles that use little or no gas are on the rise. Between more fuel-efficient cars and a gas tax that is limping along, the Highway Trust Fund is running on empty.

Kansas' T-Works transportation program depends on federal money from the Highway Trust Fund to keep its highways and bridges functioning safely and efficiently. With 19 percent of the state's major roads in poor or mediocre condition and 18 percent of its bridges structurally deficient or no longer able to accommodate the traffic flow, Kansas can ill afford to lose \$364 million in federal funding if the fund runs dry.

The law that authorizes and funds national transportation policy will expire on Sept. 30 of this year. But the Highway Trust Fund is projected to run dry sometime in August.

It sounds crazy that our Highway Trust Fund could go bankrupt, and we won't be able to pay to repair our roads and bridges, but unless Congress acts this is exactly what will happen.

To prevent insolvency, Congress must inject new revenue into the fund. Failure to do so would curtail critical construction projects and kill tens of thousands of middle-class construction jobs across the country, potentially during the peak summer construction season.

That would be terrible for our economy, which is just getting back on its feet. And it would have direct consequences in Kansas, as it would affect the state's ability to deliver needed highway improvement projects as promised by T-Works and put 6,300 jobs at risk.

Congress could stave off this crisis by increasing revenue to the fund through a modest 10 cent increase in the gasoline tax. Such an increase would generate the \$15 billion needed to sustain the trust fund for another year.

During that time, Congress could move forward with reforming the corporate tax code, which has been proposed by President Obama and House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Dave Camp, R-Mich. Both recommended that a portion of the revenue derived from corporate tax reform be directed to the trust fund, which would keep it flush for another 10 years.

In order to raise awareness about the importance of federal funding in America, we are taking part in Infrastructure Week 2014, which is a series of events designed to build awareness and educate both the public and policymakers about America's infrastructure challenges. By bringing more attention to the funding needs of our country, we hope to rouse Congress into making the necessary decisions to inject capital into America's infrastructure.

Congress should act immediately to keep the Highway Trust Fund from going bankrupt. The economic prosperity of Kansas – and our nation – depends upon it.

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