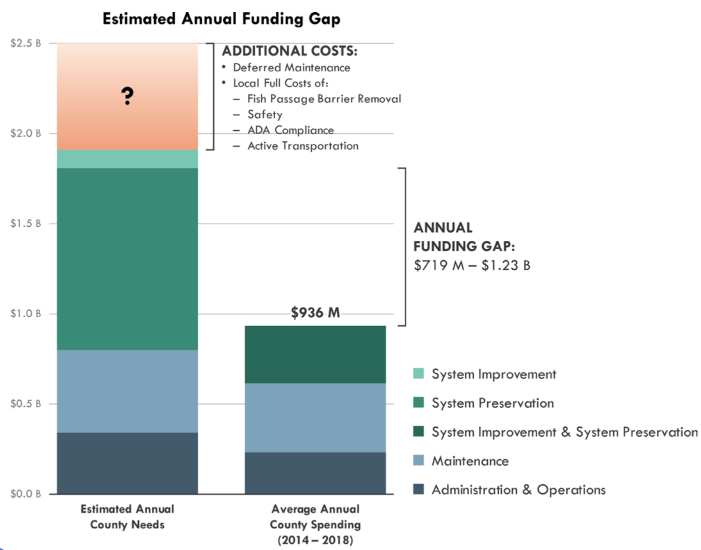
County Roads

The Heart of Our Statewide Transportation Network and the "Missing Middle" in Maintenance Funding

Topline

Counties plan, build and maintain 60 percent of the roads in the state and 45 percent of the bridges – and yet their primary funding sources are limited and dwindling, placing county budgets and community infrastructure at risk.

Counties' share of the cost of roadway maintenance has ballooned over the past 30 years.



69% of all county roadway funding comes from county residents, while state sources provide 23%, and federal sources provide 8%.

In 1988, these figures were 50%, 36%, and 13% respectively.

Needed improvements in the way we plan roads – including species and habitat protection, ADA compliance, and enhanced safety – are also driving up counties' costs.

At the same time, counties' revenues have been greatly diminished, largely through unintended consequences.

The state has doubled gas taxes over the past 20 years mostly for dedicated projects –

while counties' share of gas tax revenue has declined by half.

County tax bases have declined

due to annexation and incorporation of high revenue areas, while levy limits keep property tax revenue growth below inflations.

Taken together, this means counties face

an annual transportation funding gap between $719 million and $1.23 billion

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Meanwhile, deferred maintenance on county roads and bridges poses a growing risk to communities and county budgets.

Total road deferred maintenance costs for all counties are between $4.7 billion and $6.3 billion— five to six times total annual transportation expenditures across all counties.

CRACK SEAL
$5,000
per mile

CHIP SEAL
$40,000
per mile

OVERLAY
$300,000
per mile

RECONSTRUCTION
$1.5M
per mile

Regular maintenance of a roadway or bridge extends the lifecycle and reduces costs; deferred maintenance leads to increased costs due to major refurbishment or replacement.

The cost to replace an aging bridge exceeds most counties' entire annual transportation budget

The good news is: There are common sense solutions that can correct course and put roadway funding on a sustainable path for the future.

Proportional transportation funding:

allocating approximately half of new gas tax, road use charge, or carbon tax revenues.

Increase existing state funding:

appropriating more funds to the formulaic allocation program (CAPP) and competitive grant program (RAP) for counties.

Federal fund swap:

keeping more federal dollars for state transportation need and allocating more state dollars for county transportation needs.

Bottom Line

The unsustainable maintenance funding squeeze facing counties could soon become a crisis – or it can be prevented with common-sense solutions that correct course rather than drain budgets and endanger communities.

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