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COALITION LAUNCHES TO FOCUS ATTENTION ON TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

Revenue sought to improve transportation systems and boost economic competitiveness

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – A statewide coalition has launched to educate the public and state legislators as it seeks an increase and reform in Tennessee’s transportation fees. The coalition aims to recruit other interested parties to join in seeking a comprehensive funding solution to maintain and expand Tennessee’s critical transportation system.

Participants in the Transportation Coalition of Tennessee will include businesses, citizens, community leaders, public officials and organizations that are interested in continuing Tennessee’s transportation infrastructure for the long haul.

“Over the coming weeks, we will seek out those who believe in the government’s fundamental role to maintain our vital transportation infrastructures for the purpose of increasing mobility and safety while people and goods are moved throughout Tennessee,” said Susie Alcorn, executive director of the Tennessee Infrastructure Alliance.

Alcorn says the Transportation Coalition steering committee will include representatives from the Tennessee Infrastructure Alliance, Auto Club Group/AAA Tennessee, Tennessee Public Transportation Association, Tennessee Trucking Association, Tennessee County Highway Officials Association, Tennessee Municipal League, American Council of Engineering Companies of Tennessee and Tennessee Road Builders Association.

Tennessee is a pay-as-you-go state, with transportation projects funded primarily by state and federal fuel tax revenues. The dollars are apportioned for state and local projects, which include maintenance, repair and new construction.

Increases in fuel efficiency combined with gasoline and diesel taxes' not being increased for 25 years have led to a massive backlog of planned improvements, including work on deficient bridges and roads. Tennessee levies a state tax of 21.4 cents per gallon on gasoline and 18.4 cents on diesel fuel, which is combined with federal fuel taxes of 18.4 cents and 24.4 cents, respectively. Vehicle registration fees also contribute to the transportation fund.

Transportation experts estimate it would take an additional \$800 million annually to begin to seriously address some of the backlog of badly needed road projects across the state.

Tennessee Department of Transportation officials warned late last year that the state is in increasing danger of being able to provide only basic maintenance on roads and bridges, leaving many projects aimed at keeping up with population growth and addressing needed safety improvements on the drawing board.

“Business leaders, economic development professionals and elected officials see the growing shortfall as a potential hindrance to future economic development in Tennessee,” said Alcorn. “We hope interested parties will join the Transportation Coalition to add their expertise and insights as to the best way to move forward to address this issue.”

The coalition will work throughout 2015 to build support and awareness for the issue, says Bill Moore, chairman of the Tennessee Infrastructure Alliance.

“A maintenance-only budget means no new roads and no new transportation options,” said Moore. “That will hamper economic development efforts. It will make our highways and roads less safe. It will mean increased traffic congestion and more inconvenience for motorists.”

For more information or to join the Transportation Coalition of Tennessee, visit the website at www.TransportationCoalitionTN.org.

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Additional resources:

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Clips of interest:

<http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/politics/2014/12/16/midstate-mayors-seek-money-transportation-fixes/20492435/>

<http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/politics/2014/12/20/gas-tax-increase-gains-momentum-tennessee/20663975/>

<http://www.tennessean.com/story/in-session/2014/12/12/ron-ramsey-gas-hike-comprehensive-plan/20297605/>

http://www.knoxnews.com/opinion/editorials/editorial-haslam-should-propose-fuel-tax-restructuring_27921618

<http://www.theleafchronicle.com/story/money/business/2014/12/29/home-front-push-road-work-vital/21019993/>

<http://www.timesnews.net/article/9083973/states-should-raise-gas-tax-not-create-a-mileage-tax>

<http://www.state.tn.us/tacir/infrastructure.html>