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Subject: ED LS: Road Funding (3 articles)

Simrill-led panel on S.C. road funding convenes

By Tim Smith

The Greenville News September 15, 2014

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By Tim Smith

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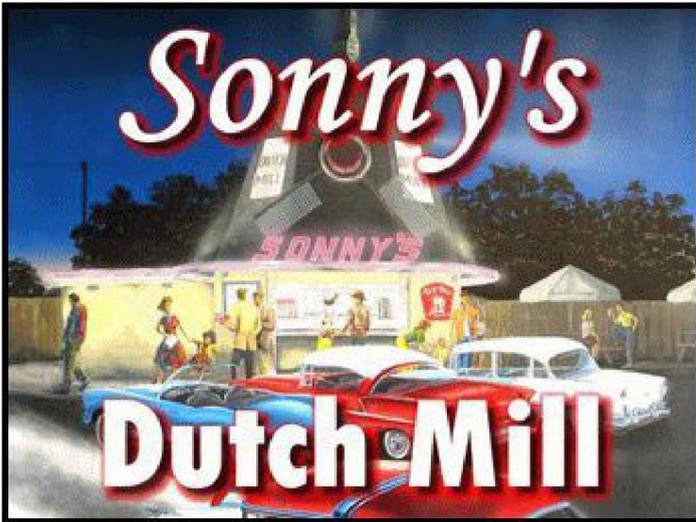
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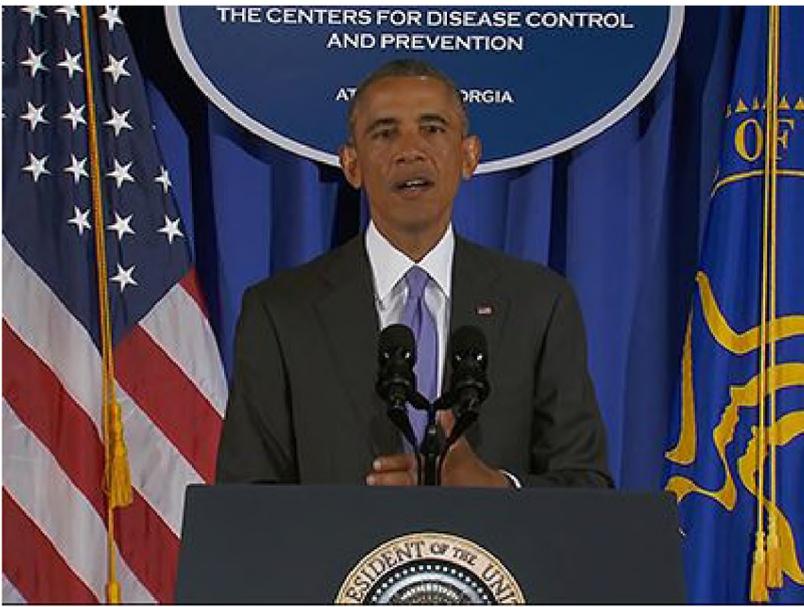
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A photoshopped CoverGirl ad is going viral, calling for Roger Goodell to step down as NFL commissioner in light of the Ray Rice domestic abuse scandal. TC Newman (@PurpleTCNewman) has the story.



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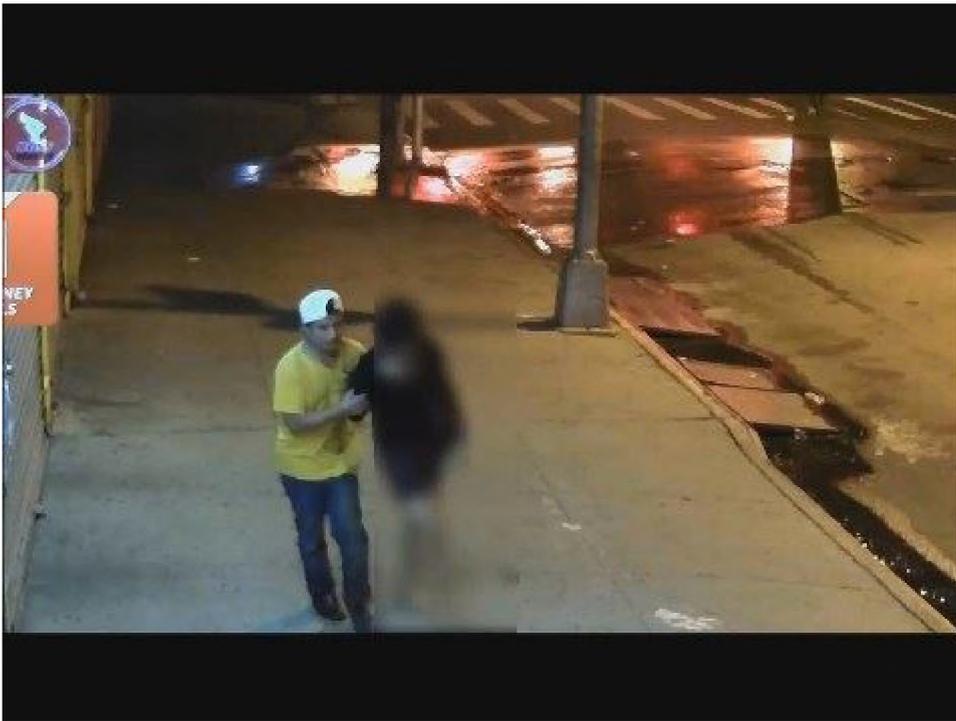
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COLUMBIA — The chairman of the South Carolina House road-funding committee says he believes his panel will ultimately recommend a “hybrid” bill of funding measures that will pay for road repairs using a combination of sources but not increases to the gas tax alone.

State Rep. Gary Simrill, a Rock Hill Republican who was appointed last week to head a special House committee to recommend road-funding legislation and legislation to better manage the state Department of Transportation, told The Greenville News that while everything is on the table, the gas tax is no longer capable of supporting the state’s needs.

“Cars are more efficient now,” he said. “People have hybrid cars now. People are going to electric cars now. If your dependency is on a diminishing return, which is what the gas tax is, you’re going to be left out. We have to look beyond that and figure out other ways to pay for roads.”

Simrill’s panel starts work Tuesday with presentations by S.C. DOT, the Department of Revenue and the state Treasurer’s office.

The panel is expected to issue its recommendations by the time lawmakers return to work in January for a new session.

Gov. Nikki Haley has long threatened a veto of any gas tax increase and said she will unveil her plan to fund roads in January, two months after voters go to the polls to choose between re-electing her or one of her challengers, who include Sen. Vincent Sheheen, a Democrat, and Tom Ervin, a former judge who describes himself as an independent Republican.

The state faces a shortfall in infrastructure funding of \$42 billion until 2040, according to a DOT draft report last month. The state operates the fourth largest state-maintained highway system in the nation and relies on a state gas tax that is among the nation’s lowest and has not been raised since 1987.

The state Senate set road funding as a priority earlier this year but adjourned without even debating the legislation.

Simrill said while future meetings will decide what the panel wants to do to fund infrastructure needs, he expects the final product will be a combination.

“I think at the end of the day, on the revenue side, you’re going to see a hybrid version,” he said. “You’re going to see more baseline money going into road paving. You’ll look at some different tax portions that could go. If you say we’re going to rely on gas tax only and the increasing of the gas tax, it will not meet the threshold of what the need is,” he said.

Simrill said he also wants to see what South Carolina’s neighboring states do to address funding growth on their highways.

He said everything is on the table, too, when it comes to discussion of managing highway funding and how DOT is governed. A provision in the law passed in 2007, which allows the governor to appoint a secretary of transportation to direct DOT, sunsets next year if lawmakers do not vote to continue it.

“What we want is more communication between locals and DOT,” he said. “We want a consensus-building team, not a confusion-building team. Those are aspects we need to talk to DOT about. And I think that really comes first before you say, ‘Raise a tax.’”

Read more here: http://www.heraldonline.com/2014/09/15/6326871_simrill-led-panel-on-sc-road-funding.html?sp=/100/104/&rh=1#storylink=cpy

Below is the link to the presentations from the DOT Infrastructure and Management meeting on yesterday for your use.

<http://scstatehouse.gov/committeeinfo/HouseTransportationInfrastructureAndManagementAdHocCommittee/HouseTransplnInfraAndMgmtAdHocCommittee.php>

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Gregory: SC road solutions should be driven by the numbers

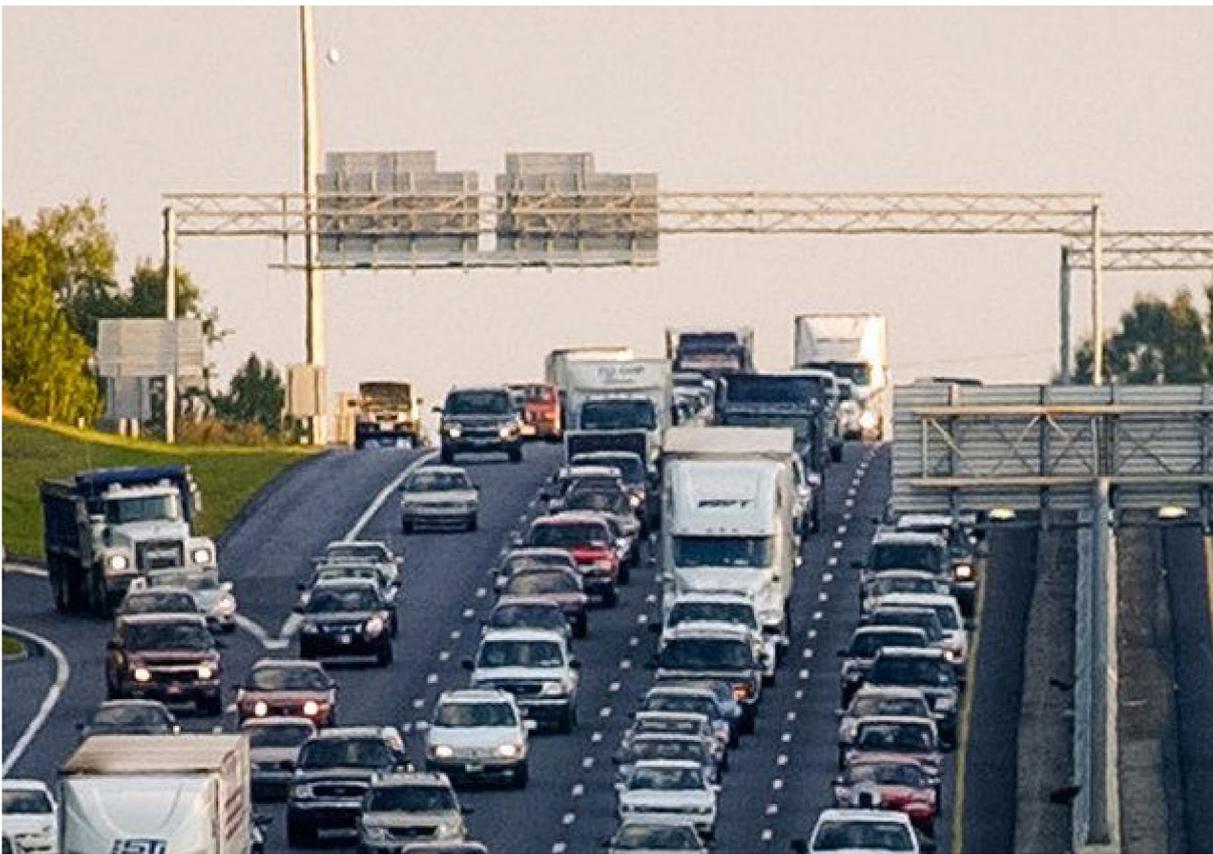
By Greg Gregory

Guest Columnist September 17, 2014

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By Greg Gregory

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FILE PHOTO — THE STATE



Columbia, SC — Our roads are an asset, and as with most assets their condition can be measured by numbers. What follows are figures that must be considered in order to make our roads and bridges as safe and smooth as they were a generation ago.

4: South Carolina's rank among 50 states in miles of state-maintained roads.

41,460: The number of those miles.

47: Where S.C. fuel tax ranks among the states.

1: Recent ranking of Rock Hill for the nation's cheapest fuel.

16.75 cents: South Carolina's fuel tax per gallon.

1987: When the state's fuel tax last was increased.

7.8 cents: Purchasing power of the tax today compared to 1987.

33 cents: What the per-gallon tax would be today if it had been adjusted for inflation since 1987.

6 cents: S.C. fuel tax in 1937, when paving began on many of what were then farm-to-market roads.

36.5 cents: North Carolina's fuel tax.

\$560 million: Transportation Department's revenue from state taxes this fiscal year.

\$451 million: Portion of that revenue derived from taxes on fuel.

62 percent: Increase in the number of vehicle miles traveled in South Carolina since 1987.

14: Average mpg for new cars in 1975.

33: Average mpg for new cars today.

54: Mandated average mpg for 2025.

61 percent: Interstate road miles rated in good condition.

10 percent: Secondary, non-federal-aid-eligible road miles rated in good condition.
33 percent: Non-federal-aid-eligible road miles in poor condition in 2008.
50 percent: Non-federal-aid-eligible road miles in poor condition in 2013.
10,410: Miles of non-federal-aid-eligible roads in poor condition.
\$3 billion: Projected cost at \$300,000 per lane mile to reconstruct those non-federal-aid-eligible roads.
\$105 million: Amount currently devoted to that each year.
2 times: The amount the Legislature increased funding for non-federal-aid-eligible roads in 2013.
10 times: Cost of reconstructing a road vs. preserving it.
\$70.5 billion: Amount the state Transportation Department projects South Carolina will need between now and 2040 to bring all roads and bridges into good condition
\$27.6 billion: Amount South Carolina currently expects to collect over that time.
\$42.8 billion: The shortfall.
\$1.6 billion: Transportation Department's total budget for this year.
\$1.47 billion: Average shortfall per year through 2040.
\$120 million: Average annual growth in state general fund budget over the past decade
8 percent: Portion of the \$1.47 billion annual shortfall that could be covered by devoting the \$120 million in growth each year to roads.
1: South Carolina's national rank in tire manufacturing. Maybe because we need more new ones than anyone else.

Our state faces a dual road challenge. Roads in our urban areas are clogged and in need of thoughtful strategic expansion to increase traffic flow. Traffic isn't a problem in rural counties, but residents there must traverse unsafe secondary roads that have fallen into disrepair. The longer action to generate additional funding is delayed, the more each challenge will cost.

Inflation has reduced the purchasing power of our fuel tax by more than 50 percent since it was last increased in 1987. Higher-mileage vehicles have decreased it by another 25 percent. These trends are irreversible. These facts mean that South Carolina must increase funding for our roads if only to stave off further decline. From where should it come? Some say an increased fuel tax. Others say from growth in the state's general fund. Both are correct.

The pothole we are in is so deep that it will be decades before we bring all our roads up to good condition. One thing we can do right away, though, is stop the bleeding. The numbers don't lie. The time for comprehensive action toward smoother, safer roads is now.

Read more here: <http://www.thestate.com/2014/09/17/3685658/gregory-sc-road-solutions-should.html?sp=/99/168/#storylink=cpy>

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