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Our View

New gas tax would be right thing at the right time

On April 15, Tax Day 2015, S.C. House members passed a roads bill that would raise the state's tax on gasoline by 10 cents a gallon. If there is ever a time to do such a thing, it's now, when prices are lower and people are better able to swallow the increase.

In recent weeks, possibly to prepare citizens for the measure, legislators have floated the notion that counties should take back caring for their roads. The outcry from local politicians to the state politicians was the same all over: "Don't force us to do something we are not capable of doing and that you're getting the money to do."

What is clear is the state needs to find a way to pay for repairs to its crumbling roads. That's a first step. Those charged with bettering the battered road system then must ensure they hire competent and qualified contractors to properly execute the road repairs. Having the money to pay for road repairs is a first step in correcting our problem, if we, however, pay for poor quality workmanship and materials, we'll pay a higher price down the road, again.

This current tax could raise some \$427 million a year. It also increases the maximum state sales tax on new vehicles to \$500 from \$300. The measure passed 87-20.

To broker the deal on raising the gasoline tax, lawmakers, following the Governor's lead, looked to whittle away at individual income taxes. This move cuts the average S.C. taxpayer's income taxes by about \$48 a year, and is phased-in after two years. It would also reduce the state's \$6.9-billion-a-year general fund by about \$50 million.

Gov. Haley disapproves of the measure, liking her plan better: a 10 cent-a-gallon gas-tax increase, phased in over three years, coupled with her two percent cut to the state's top-end seven percent income tax payers, phased in over 10 years.

The end result is the same in both plans. The gasoline tax goes up. Which individuals get tax breaks differs.

"Waiting to address this issue increases repair costs, discourages investment and jeopardizes the safety of South Carolina drivers," S.C. House Speaker Jay Lucas said in a statement.

We agree. The pain of change will be felt much less if we do something now, rather than argue and debate and wait.

The S.C. Department of Transportation has estimated it needs about \$1.5 billion a year in additional money to repair, maintain and expand the state's roads. Giving that responsibility of road maintenance to counties make no sense, as they lack the power to do what the state legislators can do, add a tax at the place most likely to make a difference.

The millions of drivers zipping through our state on our roads can help us bear the burden of road maintenance.



nance. Those who use the roads the most help the most in its care.

The plan now goes to the state's Senate, which has its own roads proposal, one that is expected to raise \$800 million a year for roads by increasing gas taxes by 12 cents a gallon. It includes no income tax cut for the state's workers.

We urge lawmakers to pass the plan so we can all move forward on roads built to be traveled well.

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