



Special panel mulls options to fund transportation needs

By *Steven K. Paulson, Associated Press*

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Gov. Bill Ritter's blue-ribbon panel Tuesday began looking for sources of funding for what lawmakers and politicians are calling Colorado's quiet crisis of crumbling bridges and roads.

Options on the table include increases in fuel, sales and use, income, and property taxes; tolls; fees on such services as vehicle registration; even selling the Colorado Lottery.

Lawmakers said that the state needs transportation funding that is predictable, accountable and sustainable and that voters need to know what they're getting in return.

"We have a national crisis in transportation," said state Sen. Suzanne Williams, D-Aurora, adding that \$4-a-gallon gas isn't going away soon.

Rep. Don Marostica, R-Loveland, said lawmakers need a bipartisan plan to get more money for roads and people who are willing to take the political heat for plans that are sure to provoke criticism.

"The state itself needs to have a little pain in this game," Marostica told the panel.

Ritter last week announced he was continuing the panel for another year, saying that federal transportation funding is being cut by a third, state revenues are declining, and maintenance, repair and construction costs are climbing. The current funding formula of registration fees, user fees and state money is not sustainable, he said.

"It's not responsible to continue delaying. It threatens our overall quality of life and our economy," Ritter told the semiannual meeting of Colorado Counties Inc., a coalition of county governments.

In December, Ritter's Blue Ribbon Transportation Finance and Implementation Panel said maintenance of roads and bridges should be the state's first priority.