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editorial

Right road, but wrong direction

Though Colorado's highways need funding, we oppose a state senator's plan to carve money out of the state's general budget.

By The Denver Post

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Amendment 23's most onerous provision is about to expire, so what does one lawmaker want to do? Kick it over to transportation funding.

State Sen. Greg Brophy, R-Wray, wants to transfer the 1 percentage point annual increase, above inflation, from K-12 to our state's roads and bridges. It could raise \$3.8 billion from 2011 to 2021, he said.

But carving extra money out of the general fund at a time when lawmakers are drastically cutting spending due to recessionary budget deficits doesn't make sense.

Brophy is correct that Colorado's roads need attention. We have long argued for increased

spending on our transportation infrastructure.

Experts have said the state ought to spend as much as an additional \$1.5 billion a year to maintain and build state roads and bridges. The newly increased automobile registration fees are expected to bring in \$250 million a year.

But Brophy's idea comes at a time when the state is eliminating beds at nursing homes and mental health institutes, offering early parole for prisoners and cutting other needed services. Next year, K-12 education likely will be on the chopping block.

The Wray senator wanted to use the sunset provision in Amendment 23 that requires school funding to increase every year by the rate of inflation plus 1 percentage point, according to The Post's Tim Hoover.

In 2011, Amendment 23 will only require an increase by the rate of inflation.

We've been critical of the many dedicated-funding provisions in Colorado's constitution that have put a stranglehold on our elected officials' ability to make responsible decisions when it comes to funding our state's needs and priorities.

Brophy would have the 1 percent continue for roads, but it would no longer be cemented in the state constitution. If it was set in statute, it would be easier for lawmakers to override in cash-poor years, which is important.

The recession is going to remain a headache and

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heartache for budget writers many months after the economy recovers. Still, we urge lawmakers to continue looking for ways to improve the transportation budget.

Controversy over the new registration fees shows that finding new money isn't easy. But one of the best ways to bring money into the state's coffers is to improve commerce, and roads are a central part of that equation.

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