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editorial

## One small piece of highway plan

**Raising Colorado's vehicle license fees is a bold idea, but it must be part of a broader plan to address highway funding.**

By The Denver Post

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A Littleton Democrat wants to re-pitch an idea that went nowhere last year: raising vehicle registration rates to bolster the state's crumbling roads and bridges.

We're glad to see state Rep. Joe Rice once again stick his neck out, especially given the beating Democrats took on the issue last year.

Even though it's a bold idea, vehicle registration fee increases alone wouldn't be enough to address the state's transportation needs.

But such a proposal could be part of a broader plan to address Colorado's daunting transportation infrastructure needs, which are coming to the fore just as state revenues are plummeting.

Revised budget estimates from Gov. Bill Ritter's office now project this year's revenues will be \$230 million less than anticipated. Legislative budget staff put the shortfall at \$604 million.

Given the state's budget problems, the price tag for fixing the state's transportation problems seems out of reach. Even without a shortfall last session, transportation funding actually declined.

Ritter's transportation panel last year determined that an additional \$500 million a year is the minimum needed just to maintain the system and \$1.5 billion in new money is needed to fix and upgrade ailing roads and bridges.

And while we applaud Rice for resurrecting the vehicle registration fee issue, it can only be a small part of an overall package of answers for transportation. A broad coalition of people in government, business and other leadership positions have to pull together to come up with a plan and then convince Coloradans it's an appropriate answer.

Incoming state House Speaker Terrance Carroll spoke to the Denver Post editorial board Monday, acknowledging the condition of Colorado's crumbling roads and bridges. He said statehouse leadership was looking at a twofold approach in addressing them.

A short-term approach would involve economic stimulus money from Washington, D.C., as part of the new president's plan to jump-start the economy. Carroll said discussions were taking place about the structure of a longer-term plan to take on transportation needs.

He mentioned highway tolling as a potential part of the revenue answer, as well as changing the way the state calculates auto registration fees to take into account miles traveled, something Oregon is exploring.

The Oregon experiment includes GPS technology and charging drivers by the mile as opposed to a

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flat gas tax.

Colorado's gas tax, which is added at the pump, has not been raised since 1992 and falls significantly below the national average.

However, given diminishing gasoline consumption and the state and national push toward higher-mileage vehicles and alternative energy cars, increasing the gas tax may no longer be the best way to go. It's not a steady revenue stream.

As the legislature heads back into session, we hope a transportation plan of broad scope and support emerges — along with the bipartisan political leadership needed to make it a reality.

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