

Gov. Jerry Brown wants investment in California roads

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With the bipartisan water bond accord in their rear-view, California Gov. Jerry Brown implored lawmakers Monday to come together and begin the costly task of repairing the state's crumbling roads.

Brown said following passage of the \$7.5 billion water bond that it's equally important for the state to deal with its long-standing road and highway challenges. California faces [\\$59 billion in deferred road maintenance](#), and the price tag to meet the state's long-term transportation needs is significantly higher.

"Each year, we fall further and further behind and we must do something about it," Brown said during a speech marking his fourth inauguration as governor. Asked afterward how he planned to accomplish his infrastructure goals, Brown said the task is "daunting" and declined to lay out a path to achieve it.

"It's a tall mountain to climb. Let me just put it that way," he said. "So it's difficult. I'm going to pull people together, and if there's enough that we can get some Republican consensus, then we can do things."

Republicans said they support large-scale road repairs, but questioned Brown's emphasis on the \$68 billion high-speed rail project.

Senate Minority Leader Bob Huff, R-Diamond Bar, said it's impossible to "discount" the resources flowing to the rail system. Roads are falling into disrepair and inner cities are gridlocked, Huff said. "We should be doing things not just long-term, investing in the future, but taking care of now," he said.

Last year, Republican lawmakers laid out an unsuccessful plan to give voters a choice to shift \$8.5 billion for high-speed rail toward local transit programs.

Transportation needs are far and away the state's largest share of postponed maintenance. Much of the highway system was constructed between the 1950s and early 1970s, but the population has ballooned as has the number of miles driven.

Last year, a coalition of transportation advocates proposed a ballot measure that would have more than doubled the vehicle license fee for road improvements. They abandoned the effort, which would have phased in a 1 percent license fee increase.

The last statewide transportation bond approved by voters came in 2006. On Monday, Brown discounted the possibility of seeking bond funding, saying the state already has significant debt.

Potentially complicating Brown's efforts for funding is a separate proposal he announced Monday to reduce gasoline use in cars by up to 50 percent in 15 years. Accomplishing that feat would make a gas tax increase less lucrative even if it was approved. The last state gas tax increase came in 1990, when then-Republican Gov. George Deukmejian teamed up with business leaders to push Proposition 111, a voter-approved measure that raised the excise tax to 14 cents a gallon and affixed an automatic 1 cent increase a year through 1994.

Will Kempton, executive director of Transportation California, said the state needs to find creative ways to pay for the debt, perhaps by charging fees based on how much a motorist drives.

Democratic lawmakers said they are awaiting the governor's specific proposal. Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins, D-San Diego, noted that San Diego County has a \$2 billion infrastructure deficit.

Local government groups have for years sought more transportation funding from Sacramento. Last year, a report promoted by organizations representing California's counties and cities estimated that it would take \$7.3 billion annually to bring the state's streets and roads up to safe standards.

"Infrastructure, that's the lifeblood of our economy," said Assemblyman Ken Cooley, D-Rancho Cordova. "Our bridges, our roads, if those fall apart, our economy is going to."

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