

## Assembly speaker wants new fee to pay for road repairs

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LOCAL PolitiCal



Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins (D-San Diego) is pushing a new plan to fund road maintenance with a new fee on drivers. (Rich Pedroncelli / Associated Press)

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Assembly speaker wants new fee on California drivers to help pay for road repairs

Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins proposed a plan Wednesday for funding road maintenance with \$1.8 billion in fees on California drivers.

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The fees would total roughly \$52 annually for most people behind the wheel, according to preliminary details released by the speaker's office.

"California's roads and transportation infrastructure simply aren't in the shape they need to be in order to keep people and goods moving," said Atkins (D-San Diego), who announced the proposal during a forum on transportation policies in Sacramento.

[Lawmaker wants state to study if mileage fee could replace gas tax](#)

Scraping together money for infrastructure improvements is a priority for Gov. Jerry Brown, who has called on lawmakers to find new ways to pay for \$59 billion in overdue repairs to

highways, roads and bridges.

The bills have mounted as gas tax revenue lags behind maintenance needs, especially with newer, more efficient vehicles needing less fuel. The state had \$6.2 billion less funding than needed for repairs last year, more than six times the gap in 2004, according to the state transportation agency.

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Atkins' proposal would require a two-thirds vote for legislative approval because it creates a new fee. That means she would need support from Republicans who are often skeptical about raising additional revenue but have expressed interest in funding infrastructure projects.

"Transportation has traditionally been a bipartisan issue, and I believe we can pass this plan and provide a new funding stream in a fair and comprehensive way," she said.

The new fee, called a "road user charge," could be tacked on to insurance bills or vehicle registration charges. The \$1.8 billion generated annually would be used in two different ways, according to Atkins' office.

Roughly \$800 million would go directly to road improvements. The additional \$1 billion would free up money in the general fund and allow truck weight fees to be spent on maintenance, their original purpose before they were redirected to help cover debt costs.

The speaker's plan would also use other money to replenish accounts intended for transportation needs, bringing total annual funding for infrastructure to a total of \$2 billion.

Even though the plan would increase costs for California drivers, Atkins told reporters it was worthwhile.

"If you take someone who is working poor or poor, and they're driving on deficient roads, they're going to have a higher maintenance bill," she said.

Assembly Republican leader Kristin Olsen (R-Modesto) said she was pleased that Atkins was tackling the infrastructure issue, but said raising fees was the wrong way to do it.

"There are funding options for our critical road improvements other than looking deeper into the pockets of Californians," she said in a statement.

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## **UPDATE**

5:39 p.m. -- This story has been updated with a comment from Assembly Republican leader Kristin Olsen.