

There's a cost to ending gas tax indexing

By **BOB COOK**

Published: March 31, 2006

This week, Wisconsin motorists will see the gas tax automatically increase to cover inflation for the final time. That's because the Legislature earlier this year voted to repeal the state's gas tax indexing, beginning in April 2007.

This year's one-cent increase will not cost motorists any extra money because it was offset by a one-cent reduction in the gas tax dedicated to the petroleum cleanup fund. Repeal will cost the transportation fund approximately \$100 million in the upcoming state budget.

The loss of this revenue will have real implications for all of us.

Highway projects taking an average of 12 years to complete will be delayed longer. These delays likely will result in lost lives and lost time.

Airport expansions that attract business and tourism will be put on hold. Your transit system will charge more and offer fewer routes. And your local roads will be repaired less frequently.

We need to look for alternative funding sources if we hope to maintain or improve our critical transportation infrastructure - highways, local roads, airports, mass transit, harbors and railways.

Legislative leaders have recognized this impending problem and have taken action by forming the bipartisan "Road to the Future" committee. This committee will spend the next nine months assessing the state's transportation needs and exploring possible revenue sources.

This is critical work. With the abolition of Wisconsin's gas tax indexing, we as a state will need to find a way to replace \$1.8 billion in lost revenue over the next 10 years.

These will be interesting times. While some celebrate this political victory, it is sobering to think about what its implications will be for the safety, economic development and quality of life that we have all come to expect from a transportation system we need every day.

I applaud the efforts of our legislative leaders serving on this important committee and would encourage you to participate in their drive to come up with solutions to this important challenge.

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