

Is this the time for more road taxes? You bet it is

Posted by [Andrew Heller | The Flint Journal](#) May 20, 2009 12:00PM

If you could change one thing about the state of Michigan right now, with the snap of your fingers, what would it be?

More jobs?

I mean other than that.

Make the Lions less lousy?

C'mon. Be reasonable. You know that'll never happen.

The clouds? We could use fewer clouds.

I meant something we can actually do something about.

The roads?

Ding, ding, ding! Now you're thinking. I think most people - granted one wish - would choose better roads in Michigan over just about anything else.

Why?

Because, as you and I know only too well, they - not to put too fine a point on it - they stink. They stink like my 15-year-old son's sneakers. They stink like his gym bag after he's left a wet towel in it for a week. They stink like ...

Well, you get the idea. They're not good. And by "not good," I mean "goat paths."

I bring this up now because our fearless leaders in Lansing - after more less ignoring the problem for decades -- are finally, sorta, kinda ready to do something about it.

A coalition of heavy hitters in Lansing wants to dump the 19-cents-per-gallon flat gas tax with a stew of other taxes and fees that would ultimately result in an estimated \$1.8 billion to fix the roads. Others say it would be simpler to simply raise the existing per gallon tax.

Either way, as usual, the timing is perfect. The nation is in the worst recession since the Great Depression. The state's economy is in shambles. Chrysler is in bankruptcy. General Motors will join them soon.

What better time to raise taxes, right?

Well, yes, at least as far as I'm concerned. The roads must be fixed. It's a problem that isn't going to go away, and it stifles business development and tourism in Michigan. (Would you move your business here if you drove on our roads for more than five minutes? Would you visit more than once? Michigan - the Shock Absorber State.)

Worse than that, the sorry state of our roads -- this'll sound strange, but I swear it's true -- is mentally debilitating to one and all.

We drive these roads day in and day out and, aside from the sheer physical toll on our vehicles and bodies, they reinforce in us the image that Michigan isn't a good place, a prosperous place, a place we want to stay.

You wonder why all our kids grow up and leave? Yeah, jobs, of course. But also there's a slow, subtle build-up in them of negative little messages about the state. The roads stink, the parks look shabby, the cities offer little, nothing seems first -rate. So off they go.

Good roads make a difference. I know it first-hand. My neighborhood was just repaved, transforming it overnight - physically and mentally -- from a place you'd never want to buy a house to what it is, a great family neighborhood.

The cost? Five grand per house, spread over 10 years.

That's steep. But some things you can't afford not to do.

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