

The Choice: Pay for Good Roads, or Pay for Bad Roads

The truth: Very little in life is free. Incremental taxes aren't free, but neither are bad roads.

Hey, why should I vote to increase my tax bill? What's the cost to the vehicle owner for bad roads? It certainly can't be much..... right? Well, let's add up a few of those costs:

- Increased car and truck maintenance and repair
 - Tire damage \$200+
 - Wheel damage \$200+
 - Damage to shock absorbers and struts \$150+
 - Suspension damage \$300+
 - Steering system damage \$200+
 - Exhaust system damage \$150+
 - Engine damage ???!!
- We won't even try to put a cost on the catastrophic failure of any of the above causing an accident, injury, or death.

Isn't repair and replacement of wear parts normal? Sure, some expenses are part of "normal" motor vehicle maintenance. However, let's take a look at the **hidden** cost of bad roads. A study published by the Washington Post last month found that the extra annual vehicle operation and maintenance costs due to bad road conditions, per driver in Colorado, were \$572.00. The findings (see handout) indicate that we're in better shape than some states, but much worse than MOST. Bear in mind that this hidden cost is over and above normal expenses and must be acknowledged in calculating the **true** cost of deferring appropriate County road maintenance funding. Two facts to remember: 1) a car is typically the second-largest purchase for most people, and 2) the average age of all cars in the U.S. is in excess of 11 years.

How 'bout a few more "hidden" costs?

- Excess road maintenance cost
- Excess road equipment cost
- Excess Road and Bridge personnel cost (headcount and overtime)
- Excess road chemical costs
- Unsafe driving by "others" (e.g., you judge that a safe, undamaging speed is 25 mph, but the guy behind you in his employer's truck wants to drive 45 mph in the 35 zone)... a dangerous speed "dichotomy".
- Excess wear and tear on emergency vehicles (e.g., the fire truck, Sheriff's car, or ambulance can't get to your home quick enough!).

- Do heavy trucks pay their fair share? The GAO study, Excessive Truck Weight: An Expensive Burden We Can No Longer Afford, calculated the road damage from one 18-wheeler (fully loaded) is equivalent to more than 1000 cars.
- Damaged roads can increase reaction time and stopping distance.... Once again, it's that "safety" thing.

The End Game: Voting FOR a justifiable County tax increase can reduce out-of-pocket costs. Hidden taxes are just as real as property taxes (but they're not deductible).

Other Considerations.

- Keep any proposed tax "reasonable" in the eyes of County residents. Limit tax increase to \$50 to \$75 per year, with an expiration date for the increase ("perception is reality").
- Don't equate any increase to "two beers a week"..... if hidden taxes are real, then it's a savings for most.
- Prove the County's competence at managing expenses and taxes to levels as low as professionally possible.
- Illustrate how the County has actually lowered expenses in the face of, or through:
 - Decreasing Oil & Gas revenue
 - Deferred hiring, or decreasing number of County employees versus increases in the number of residents
 - Efficient management of County services.
- Is there an unrecognized impact from unfunded mandates (state or federal)?
- When communicating with the voters, be specific. What roads, what changes, how long, how many employees saved, etc. Avoid generalities; the voter will disregard them.