



### **GUEST OPINION: SMALL FUEL TAX INCREASE IS A START**

It has been 18 years since Idaho increased the fuel tax. In fact, that was the last time the state increased either fuel tax or registration fees – the two state sources of funding for Idaho’s state road and bridge system. In the interim, we have relied heavily upon federal funding to improve our transportation system.

Since about 2006, the state has taken quite a few bites at the apple with studies, presentations and surveys. The legislature even performed an audit on the efficiency of the Idaho Transportation Department. All of these activities culminated in the 2010 Governor’s Task Force on Modernizing Transportation Funding. The Task Force reported that Idaho needed an additional \$262 million in revenue just to keep up with maintenance and repair costs. If improvements were added to that list, it is upwards of \$600 million.

Daunting numbers, aren’t they? Unfortunately, they seem to have produced a need to go after major funding increases or continue to study and talk about the gap in funding. Neither of these approaches has worked in the past decade, so the Idaho Trucking Association board of directors voted last November to change the nature of the discussion.

With the help of leadership in the Idaho House of Representatives, and especially Transportation and Defense Committee Chair Joe Palmer, we proposed a six cent fuel tax increase that would be implemented over three years. We do not know where this is going to go, but it has already helped us learn a few things.

First, most people are not concerned with a small increase, especially when there are specific problems the increase will be used to address. Second, almost all of the feedback has been that this is a long-term problem that requires a long-term solution best taken in smaller bites. Finally, most people recognize that this is a problem we all face: All of Idaho rises and falls with the tide of economic prosperity, of which an efficient transportation system is part.

The trucking industry is comprised of Idahoans. More than 39,900 of our citizens are employed either directly or indirectly in our industry. Our drivers, dispatchers, safety managers, clerks, warehouse managers and owners are your neighbors, brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers and friends. We do not take this problem lightly and will be paying from our own pockets as well as through the freight costs for the delivery of our food, medicine, clothing and other items that make up our quality of life.

We know that identifying and addressing Idaho’s transportation problems will not happen in a war of numbers, facts and figures. It will happen when we talk to each other about the problems facing our state and how we solve them together.

Though we believe the small fuel tax increase we have proposed is an excellent first step, our association’s members believe the real value will come in the conversations Idahoans will collectively have about how we solve our transportation problems. House Bill 481 is more than a proposed fuel tax increase: it is a catalyst for solutions.

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