

## **Pave the roads**

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**The good news from Washington that Vermont is poised to receive a record amount of federal highway funds is more than welcome. The condition of many Vermont roads and bridges has been deteriorating, and despite efforts to keep up with repairs and repaving, state funding for that work has been limited.**

**Vermont is set to receive about \$1 billion from Washington through 2009, a 40 percent increase over the usual appropriation. That might sound like an excessive amount of money, but it will allow Vermont only to catch up on its existing plans and not leave much extra for new projects. The increased funding has been a long time coming and is sorely needed.**

**Not only will this money make the roads safer, it will allow the state to move forward on several important projects such as Missisquoi Bay Bridge work. And experts estimate that every \$1 billion spent on transportation projects creates thousands of jobs. Everybody wins.**

**The money will pay for projects throughout the state that include work large and small. On the list: \$30 million for the small-town bridge fund; \$25 million for the interstates; \$5.8 million for the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail; as well as money for historic bridges, U.S. 7 in Charlotte, a bypass in St. Albans, and rehabilitation of an important road that leads to the village of Gilman.**

**Sen. Jim Jeffords, I-Vt., deserves credit for his work as ranking member of the Environment and Public Works Committee in securing the funding. Jeffords has tried in recent years to get this bill passed, but Congress has been unable to settle disputes over the amount and distribution of the funds. Rep. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., also secured projects for Vermont in the bill.**

**Despite all this work, Capitol Hill lawmakers have in recent years simply extended highway funding on a year-by-year basis, making it difficult for states like Vermont to plan long-term for highway and other transportation work. That ability to look beyond the next year for funding will create efficiencies that save Vermont taxpayers money.**

**Virtually every state has been lobbying Congress for this legislation. The American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials launched a campaign called "Get It Done" to put pressure on Washington. Governors, mayors and municipal planning organizations throughout the country have been pushing for action. Finally, Congress recognized the groundswell and responded.**

**Much of this money ought to be earmarked for maintenance and repair of existing roads and bridges. That work has been delayed in too many areas of the state primarily because of funding restraints, and driving on some of Vermont's deteriorating roads can be damaging to cars and risky for public safety. Fortunately, Vermont highway officials and lawmakers seem to recognize that need.**

**Improving the transportation system is also important to Vermont's economy because businesses need high-quality highways, rail and air options to ship products. Tourists will surely find Vermont a more inviting place when they are no longer bumping along rutted roads.**

**In addition, public transportation projects should receive a fair share of the money. Getting more cars off the roads and encouraging the use of buses not only slows highway deterioration, but is good for the environment by reducing polluting vehicle emissions.**

**Hats off to Vermont's congressional delegation for leading this effort. Now the hard work of planning and paving really begins.**