

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Find a way to pay

The Wichita Eagle

With gas prices and construction costs climbing, state revenues slipping and Kansans driving fewer miles and paying fewer gas taxes, state leaders will need to get more creative about the next transportation plan's funding and more discriminating about its projects.

A new Kansas Department of Transportation long-range report projects a \$1.5 billion annual gap between the \$2.9 billion in needs and expected federal, local and state revenues. ...

The KDOT report maps out the need to modernize highways and increase capacity, and preserve roads and bridges.

As difficult as it promises to be to agree on the priorities, finding the money could be harder. The KDOT report mentions as possibilities higher vehicle fees and fuel taxes, local-option taxation methods, dedicated taxes on vehicle sales or auto parts, and even "vehicle miles traveled" fees on drivers. ...

Lawmakers also must ensure that the next plan doesn't burden the state with unmanageable debt or depend too much on drawing down the state general fund.

In short, lawmakers shouldn't pass a comprehensive transportation plan without also passing a comprehensive way to pay for it.

They also will need to account for changing driving habits and changing demographics, which could mean putting more money in other transportation avenues. And the whole job would be easier if lawmakers who dared to seek fiscal discipline in road construction weren't labeled antibusiness.

Kansas takes justifiable pride in its road system, in large part because of the farsighted commitment of state lawmakers and governors of the recent past to long-term transportation plans. But as the latest \$13 billion transportation plan winds down, planning and passing the next one increasingly looks like it will be a political and fiscal feat.

About those letters . . .

The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published.

Where to write, call

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U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Rm. 143-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorrison@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St., Rm. 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, 785/296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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Rest, but with one eye open

Isn't any place sacred anymore?

Schools from as little as a one-room Amish school in Pennsylvania to the massive Columbine High School in metro-Denver have had violence.

Churches have been victims of violence as New Life church in Colorado Springs, Colo., recovers from its incident.

Now, interstate rest areas in our own backyard are on the list.

Sunday was the second incident in about six weeks where a serious crime began at a rest area. The first one was a robbery and high-speed chase of the suspect that began from the Interstate 70 rest area near Grainfield. Sunday's incident started at the I-70 rest area west of Colby.

What a scary story from Sunday. I can't imagine what it feels like to be at a rest area, minding your own business, like John Stephens was, and hit. Then the suspect threatened a woman and her children. He took off and it automatically turned into something you'd see on "Cops" ending about 70 miles away in Burlington, Colo.

These kind of moments remind me that crime can happen anytime and anywhere. I've been lucky during my life as my exposure to crime has been very limited. I've had a car window broken and some minor items stolen, but nothing like what happened at the rest area.

I do remember after a heavy snowfall in March 2006 the Colby Police Department reported a suspicious person in my neighborhood. After coming home late from Colby Trojan women's basketball in Salina, I saw footprints in the snow around my house. I thought, at first, it was from a utility worker, but after reading the report, I had reason to believe it



John Van Nostrand

• Line in the Dust

was the suspicious person. I had an unsettling feeling at the time.

Interstate rest areas have changed over the past 25 years. When I was a kid, my family traveled exclusively by car. Rest areas were always used for a variety of reasons. I remember walking into the rest area and seeing people asleep in the front seat of their car while hearing the rumble of diesel engine semis parked across the way. Rest areas were not too fancy then, as most only had covered picnic tables and places to let dogs run for a little while.

Growing up in northeast Colorado near the Nebraska border, rest areas became the setting for some legendary stories. About 20 years ago, when the Colorado-Nebraska football rivalry heated up, there were alleged confrontations between fans at rest areas between Boulder, Colo., and Lincoln, Neb., going home after games. If true, my speculation is miles of drinking by fans crammed into cars and vans turned into unnecessary comments after people saw certain license plates or car-window decals.

Now rest areas are becoming more modern and convenient for motorists. There are television monitors showing local and national weather reports and highway-construction zones in whatever state the rest area is in. Another television monitor displays pictures and

information of nearby attractions. Rows of vending machines accompany the information. The rest area west of Goodland has plenty of area information for tourists. Some even have people there to ask questions to.

Colorado took it to the next step by making a westbound rest area accessible to Old Town in Burlington - one of the town's attractions (and a darn good one too).

Some remodeled rest areas depict the area's heritage or history in the architecture and design.

I've heard of local groups and clubs having fundraisers at rest areas. With permission from the state, groups have bake sales and offer drinks to those who stop. A small-town hospital auxiliary group I know of, which did that, had great success. With the rapid growth in the Internet, some rest areas even have free, wi-fi hook up which have been a blessing to traveling business people needing to know the details of a certain document on the way to their destination.

Despite all of the things the states have done to make people's rests easier at rest areas, we still need to be careful of the surroundings.

A thug might regret confronting a parent of a child who has whined about the bathroom for 50 miles. It's better to travel in groups, but if you are alone, move quickly and have a line of defense handy (a can of mace like postal carriers can use on dogs is available). Groups of people can help - remember Flight 93 from Sept. 11.

If you must take a nap, lock your doors but crack a window for ventilation.

But sleep with one eye open.

— John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press

Community foundation offers help

By Melinda Olson

Executive director

Thomas County Community Foundation

As a young girl growing up in northwest Kansas I have always loved the caring atmosphere that our towns in this area provide: people helping people, neighbors lending a hand, knowing that if you need something you are just a shout away from a friend.

There is a lot of pride living here in Thomas County, in the heart of the nation where people do what they can, when they can to be there for each other.

That's why I am so very thrilled to have the privilege of being the director of the Thomas County Community Foundation, a place where our goal is to do exactly that, help each other.

At the heart of the matter is this: Why is a community foundation important for Thomas County? There are so many different and exciting reasons why we are fortunate to have a community foundation in Thomas County but I will limit myself to explaining the top four:

1. **Local Grants Central:** By having a community foundation in our county, we are able to quickly provide a local funding source to nonprofits, schools and government agencies with relative ease and a much simpler granting process than regional or national funding

sources. As our endowments grow, so will our grant dollars that we are able to give back to the community for nonprofit organizations and community projects. Since inception of the foundation in 2001, we have been able to give back nearly \$177,000 to Thomas County, and believe me, this is just the beginning!

2. **Donation facilitator:** The foundation is not a place to give, but a way to give. We are not here to "take away" from your favorite local charities, but rather to enhance and make the most of donations that go to your favorite causes, schools, charities and projects. All donations made to the foundation are tax deductible and we are able to ensure that your donation will be used according to your wishes.

3. **Community Catalyst:** At the community foundation, we are able to be a community catalyst. Dictionary.com defines catalyst as "a person or thing that precipitates an event or change" and additionally, a second definition on that site states that a catalyst is "a person whose talk, enthusiasm, or energy causes others to be more friendly, enthusiastic or energetic."

That is what the foundation aims to be for Thomas County, an enthusiast for Thomas County that provides a central location of communication on what the needs of our community are and how we can bring the right

people or groups into the action to make things happen. Our mission is to endow funds to improve the quality of lives for all citizens of Thomas County, and we do this by keeping in contact with community leaders, nonprofit organizations, our friends and neighbors to listen and learn as to how we can help make Thomas County the best place to live.

4. **Indicator of Hope:** By having a central place for all the items listed above, we not only encourage people in their endeavors to make where we live the best place possible, but we have the contacts and the resources to make things happen. By making things happen in our community, we are showing the up and coming generations that Thomas County is a great place to live, a great place to raise a family and that we do have the power within ourselves to be self sustaining in the quality of our lives here. That, indeed, does give us hope for our future here in the heart of America.

Melinda Olson is executive director of the Thomas County Community Foundation. Her office phone is (785) 460-9152. The office is located at 350 S. Range Suite 14 in the Thomas County Office Complex, Colby.

For more information on the Thomas County Community Foundation visit www.thomascountycommunityfoundation.com

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

