

U.S. Infrastructure Shaky, Official Says

Costly repairs mean jobs, taxes, he tells local group

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By Scott Hadly

If you thought the \$700 billion bailout of banks and financial institutions was big, you haven't looked at the bill for repairing the country's aging infrastructure.

To repair and then increase the capacity of the country's infrastructure would cost from \$87 billion to \$225 billion more a year than we are spending for decades to come, said Jack Schenendorf, vice chairman of the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission.

Schenendorf spoke last week to members of the Regional Legislative Alliance of Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties. The group consists of local politicians and members of chambers of commerce in both counties.

Schenendorf worked with the bipartisan commission to draw up a 10-point plan to revitalize the nation's transportation infrastructure. If the nation doesn't tackle the problem, he warned, "the kind of gridlock that's coming could drag our economy down with it."

The problem goes beyond longer waits in traffic — that currently costs drivers \$63 billion a year in wasted time and fuel costs — and extends to the failure of bridges, ports unable to keep up with shipping traffic and rail lines operating beyond capacity.

It's only a "looming crisis," if you thought that New Orleans had a looming crisis when Hurricane Katrina was sitting offshore and headed toward the city, Schenendorf said.

"We are in crisis," said Schenendorf. "We need bold action."

Although Republicans had appointed him to his post, Schenendorf said the new Obama administration has the potential to tackle this problem. By making an investment in the country's infrastructure, Obama could also stimulate the economy, provide jobs and help tackle some of the problems related to climate change by improving alternative modes of transportation, he said.

But that kind of investment would take money, and Schenendorf suggested the money could come from increases in the federal gas tax, taxes on freight and customs fees at ports.

This is where some members of the commission parted company, with dissenting members arguing against new taxes.

In California, voters two years ago passed Proposition 1A , which raised almost \$20 billion for transportation. But estimates pegged the cost for the transportation needs in the state at around \$200 billion, said Hamid Bahadori, of the Automobile Club of Southern California.

"So you can see there's a shortage there," Bahadori said.