



Snelling Center for Government

Vermont Roads and Bridges *To Fix or Abandon*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

During 2007 and 2008 the Snelling Center conducted a project focusing on the preservation of Vermont's roads and bridges. The premise was that the condition of roads and bridges is critical to Vermont's prosperity and to the viability of our communities in the 21st century. Failure to invest enough in preventive maintenance is leading to geometric increases in future costs. The project has included presentations, discussions, development of a Critical Data Guide, a business leaders' conference, and public surveys.

In September 2008, the Snelling Center convened business leaders from across Vermont, from many industries and with diverse philosophies, in a think-tank conference. The goals were to assess the priority transportation holds in relation to other pressing budgetary needs, and to reach consensus on strategies for long run transportation funding. The Snelling Center then posted the Critical Data Guide on the web and posed the same questions with an online survey, garnering 463 responses.

Recommendations: Four strategic recommendations to Vermont's policy-makers emerged. In advancing these we acknowledge Vermont's economic downturn and budget stress; the timing is difficult. That said, the following recommendations reflect a long term view, likely to span several business cycles.

- **Bridge rehabilitation is top priority.**
Transportation, and especially bridge rehabilitation, should become a high priority in Vermont's fiscal policy, with sufficient resources to reverse the trend of deterioration.
- **Political compromise on funding is required to amass sufficient resources for transportation.**
Compared to the current spending course, participants overwhelmingly favor a funding compromise. 89% of conferees and 63% of online respondents support "an equal share" of funding from their "least favored" source. For new revenue, participants strongly favored "user related taxes and fees," including fuel taxes, over sales, income, or other taxes.
- **Public debt has a significant role to play.**
Participants strongly favored the use of substantial new public debt to accelerate the pace of road and bridge rehabilitation.
- **Manage differently for more efficient use of transportation resources.**
Especially among business leaders, there was a strong view that there are opportunities to manage transportation projects more cost-effectively and efficiently.

The full report of this project and the Critical Data Guide are available at www.snellingcenter.org.