



Dear Editor:

Summer has arrived; in South Jersey we are keenly aware of it because of the increased amount of traffic moving (very slowly) over our highways, county and local roads – much of it heading to the Shore.

Those of us in the business community aren't complaining as those extra cars come with tourists who spend money.

But those same highways, county and local roads, regularly congested throughout the year, are in desperate need of maintenance, repair and improvement.

Lawmakers in Trenton are finally working on legislation that would increase the state's gas tax by 23 cents and dedicate more than \$2 billion a year to fund transportation construction. I say finally because not since 1988 has New Jersey increased its gas tax, currently at 14.5 cents per gallon, while New York's is at 49 cents and Pennsylvania raised theirs to 41 cents. I say finally because policy makers recognized this transportation funding "crisis" over a decade ago. I say finally because last year we were warned the transportation fund would go broke. I say finally because now if legislation is not both passed and signed by the Governor, come August 1st road construction will come to a complete stop.

There are those New Jersey residents that would respond "so what, taxes are high enough already" and wonder what is the worst that could happen? Putting aside the inconvenience of driving through a construction zone with no end date in sight, county and municipal budgets will lose the state funding from the gas tax (over \$200 million each year in local aid) to finance road and bridge repair projects. And to fill the hole in their budgets, county freeholders and municipal officials will be forced to raise the money through an increase in the tax they control – the property tax.

A safe and reliable transportation system to move people and goods is paramount to providing the quality of life we expect and demand, but it does not come without a cost. Road and bridge deficiencies are real. One way or another the money must be raised for our roads and bridges – the arteries of commerce and the heart of economic growth. An increase in the gas tax is the most appropriate and efficient funding source as it requires those who use our roads and bridges to pay for the maintenance.

And now that summer is here, and thousands of extra cars travel our roads, we can have some of those sporting out of state plates pick up the tab too.

Marlene Asselta

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