



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 30, 2017

CONTACT: Roger Martin, APR
(517) 485-6600; rmartin@martinwaymire.com

Michigan Business, Government, Transportation, Engineering Groups Urge Legislature to Fix State's Infrastructure

Infrastructure Continues to Age & Crumble — Legislature has No Plan to Fix It

LANSING, Mich. — While aging and failing infrastructure continues to threaten Michigan's lakes, rivers, drinking water, economy, and public health and safety, the Legislature continues to largely ignore a massive problem that voters and employers rate as the top issue facing the state.

In two recent polls, Michigan voters ranked fixing infrastructure as their top issue of concern. The Detroit Regional Chamber, Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce and Business Leaders for Michigan (BLM) also rank fixing infrastructure as a top issue facing the state. Many studies over the past two decades have quantified the massive problems and desperately needed repairs with Michigan's aging dams, drinking water systems, roads and bridges, and wastewater and stormwater systems.

At a news conference today (the first day of the Detroit Chamber's annual Mackinac Policy Conference that will be attended by dozens of state lawmakers), Michigan business, government, transportation, and engineering groups urged the Legislature to make fixing infrastructure a priority. Infrastructure will be a focus of a Thursday afternoon Policy Conference panel with Gov. Rick Snyder.

"Many studies have documented Michigan's infrastructure repair needs as massive, and we know what it's going to take to fix it," said Mike Nystrom, executive vice-president of the Michigan Transportation & Infrastructure Association (MITA). "But the Legislature doesn't have a plan and has eliminated all money from a fund that was specifically proposed to start the process of fixing some of the most pressing problems. We can't blame this Legislature for the condition of our infrastructure, as inaction over many decades brought us here. But it is up to our state elected leaders to provide a long-term solution, and they continue to do nothing but ignore the problem."

A December study by the Governor's 21st Century Infrastructure Commission and a January study by BLM concluded that Michigan needs to invest \$4 billion more every year for roughly 20 years to address unmet infrastructure needs. To date, the Legislature has approved a partial solution to fixing Michigan roads and bridges — passed in late 2015 but not scheduled to take full effect until 2021. That legislation will provide \$1.2 billion more a year for roads and bridges — assuming future legislatures and the next governor also agree to the plan. However, the plan does not address the state's other infrastructure needs, including aging water systems that serve 75 percent of Michigan's population, thousands of miles of sewer systems, and more than 2,000 dams.

MORE



“There’s no question that county road agencies are worried,” said Denise Donohue, director of the County Road Association of Michigan. “Michigan residents believe their roads will be fixed tomorrow, but even by 2021 we’ll have *only half* the dollars we need. And for the first time, half of these new road dollars will depend on new legislators and a new governor to approve them annually.”

She continued: “Our members wonder what if the next ‘Flint’ or the next sinkhole triggers legislators to pull funds away from roads, bridges and right-of-way improvements? We very much need the Legislature to find a long-term solution to fixing infrastructure across Michigan.”

Michigan’s business community say fixing infrastructure is essential to the state’s economy and job providers.

“Sound infrastructure is vital for economic growth. The drivers of our economy: manufacturing, agriculture and tourism depend on it,” said Andy Johnston, vice president of government affairs for the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce. “Infrastructure must be a data-driven discussion, and the data is clear. The Legislature needs to keep the funding promises made in 2015 for roads and begin laying the foundation to address other vital infrastructure systems.”

Many of Michigan’s infrastructure systems are 50 to 100 years old. Some date back to the late 1800s. The American Society for Civil Engineers (ASCE) gave Michigan’s infrastructure a “D” grade in 2009 because of its dire condition and no comprehensive plan to fix it. ASCE will issue a new report card later this year. Anecdotal examples abound of Michigan’s failing infrastructure: the Flint water crisis; sinkholes in Fraser, in and near Grand Rapids, Hamburg Township, and elsewhere; billions of gallons of sewage spill into the Au Sable River, the Huron River, the Kalamazoo River, the Boardman River, the Detroit River, Lake St. Clair, Lake Michigan and other Michigan rivers, bays and lakes every year; hundreds of dams across Michigan long ago exceeded their service life; dozens of Michigan beaches close each summer due to *E coli*; and many more.

“We have allowed our infrastructure – the very backbone of our state’s economy – to fall into disrepair,” said Ron Brenke, a professional engineer and executive director of the Michigan offices of ASCE and the American Council of Engineering Companies. “Michiganders experience our aging, deteriorating, and congested infrastructure each day and will hardly be surprised to find there is not much to be proud of when we release the 2017 Report Card for Michigan’s Infrastructure.”

Recent action taken by the Legislature appears to confirm a lack of commitment to fixing Michigan’s infrastructure. The Senate eliminated all funding (\$20 million) from the Michigan Infrastructure Fund (MIF), proposed by Gov. Snyder as a way to help local governments address their most pressing infrastructure problems until a long-term solution can be found.

“No one is pretending the MIF contained enough funds to come close to fixing all of our infrastructure needs, but it was a start,” Nystrom said. “It was a first test to see if the Legislature is really interested in fixing this state, and clearly they are failing that test.”



News conference speakers urged the Legislature to leave Mackinac Island with a commitment to work on a long-term solution to fixing the state's infrastructure.

"At some point, our elected leaders in Lansing must get serious about fixing infrastructure," Nystrom said. "Failing to do so is unthinkable as the consequences mean potential catastrophes for public health, public safety, Michigan water, and our economy."

More information about the state's infrastructure needs can be found at www.FixMIState.org, a website created by the Fix MI State campaign, which is being led by MITA.