

# State needs a transportation package now

By Dick Paylor, Past-Chair, Eastside Transportation Association

Washington needs a transportation funding package in 2013.

Without major investment in transportation infrastructure in Washington, the people of this state risk losing a lot.

If you slow to a crawl on I-5 over the next few days – which is known to happen – study the concrete below you and look for the significant cracks. You won't have to look very hard. A safe, reliable, and efficient transportation system is a crucial foundation for a vibrant economy and a competitive business climate.

Each year, the East King County Chambers of Commerce Legislative Coalition brings together 10 chambers of commerce representing the Eastside business community. The Coalition represents wineries in Woodinville, restaurants in Issaquah, a global business icon in Redmond, Microsoft, and a variety of companies and nonprofits in between.

As the voice of Eastside employers, the coalition believes the Legislature must develop and pass a comprehensive transportation funding package that maintains and preserves our existing system and completes funding of critical system-wide improvements.

Washington's economy continues to face serious challenges but many hopeful signs of economic improvement are all around us. The coalition believes it is up to the Legislature to double-down on the hopeful signs of economic improvement and pass a comprehensive transportation package. Investments in Washington's economic future must be made now.

Declining road surface quality increases safety hazards, vehicle damage, congestion, and commute times. Bridge weight restrictions and safety concerns impede critical commerce. Restoring those assets now, rather than enduring further delay, will save billions of dollars over time. Increased degradation will require more extensive – and expensive – repairs and have serious negative consequences for our economy and our communities.

At the same time, major projects critically important for the safe and efficient movement of people and products around Washington are billions short of necessary funding. The strength of the economy on the Eastside, for instance, depends on immediate completion of the SR-520 bridge replacement, I-405 Master Plan projects, as well as I-90 upgrades over Snoqualmie Pass.

Of course, other communities and regions in Washington must receive the same transportation investment dollars as the Eastside. In particular, the Coalition believes the

I-5 Columbia River Crossing project and the North-South Freeway Project completion in Spokane will help Washington reap huge economic rewards.

Presently, transportation funding is inadequate to meet statewide needs, address project backlogs, and build new capacity. The 2003 and 2005 transportation revenue packages focused on relieving congestion, but did little to address system-wide preservation, maintenance, and operation. As a result, the gas tax revenues from those packages are nearly all committed to debt service on bonds used to accelerate construction of the associated projects.

Washington must overcome these challenges and identify fair and viable funding strategies that will not negatively impact job creation and commerce, at the same time increasing accountability for results among all elements of Washington's transportation system.

The coalition believes the Washington Roundtable, a nonprofit organization comprised of executives from some of Washington's most important employers, has articulated viable funding strategies for system expansion and maintenance and operations. The coalition is also heartened Gov. Chris Gregoire is preparing a comprehensive transportation funding package in order to "set the table" for legislative productivity throughout the 2013 legislative session beginning Jan. 14.

Kicking the can down the road on a comprehensive funding plan for transportation in Washington will, undoubtedly, continue to work against the hopeful signs of economic improvement governments and business leaders see all around us. The Legislature must enact a transportation funding package directly and get Washington moving efficiently. The businesses and employees of east King County are depending on it. So is the rest of Washington.

Dick Paylor is Chair, East King County Chambers of Commerce Legislative Coalition