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# Economics Newsletter

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## THE STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA HIGHWAYS

by

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Most South Dakotans are aware of the deteriorating condition of the rail lines serving the state. But we have not noticed the deteriorating condition of the state's highways except when we hit a chuck hole with our car. In fact, the current focus on the rail crisis has diverted attention from the impending highway problem. Thus an examination of the condition of South Dakota highways may be revealing.

South Dakota is served by about 81,500 miles of highways, roads and streets. Eleven percent of this mileage is maintained by the state government while the remainder is maintained by local units of government. Just over 15,000 miles of highways are paved, of which about half are maintained by the state. These roads and highways are classified into five major groupings.

immediate maintenance before they deteriorate to the rebuilding state. The cost of the necessary improvement for these 800 miles would be \$175 million. And the state is falling behind by an additional \$30-\$40 million each year.

The secondary system contains two types of roads. Thirty percent comprise a portion of the scenic and perimeter highways, and all secondary system funding has gone into these roads. The remaining 70 percent of the secondary system is not being maintained and thus is rapidly deteriorating.

<u>Road Type</u>	<u>Approximate Mileage in South Dakota</u>
Interstate system	678
Federal aid roads	
State primary	5,877
State secondary	2,446
County and city	8,286
Local, rural and city	64,200
TOTAL	81,500

The local rural roads and city streets include those which are maintained by local units of government without Federal aid. Nationally, about 50 percent of the structure of these roads were built before 1950 and 70 percent of the bridges were built before 1935. Thus these roads were built to serve the traffic needs of the 1930's and 1940's and have been made obsolete by the large trucks and machinery used by farmers in 1979. These obsolete roads are not being maintained or improved. In 1976 less than 40 percent of the money necessary to maintain these roads in a tolerable driving condition was expended.

Each type, except the interstate system, is suffering deferred maintenance. Deferred maintenance refers to necessary repairs which are not made resulting in road deterioration. If road pavement is not resurfaced while it is still in "fair condition" by Federal standards, it will lose too much structural strength to benefit from resurfacing and must eventually be removed and replaced. The cost of rebuilding highways is approximately four and one-half times the cost of resurfacing.

Federal aid county roads are also deteriorating rapidly and need repairs. The extent of deferred maintenance is uncertain but one county road superin-

Within the state primary system there are 800 miles of highways which need

tendent states "they are going downhill." Many of these roads are also becoming technologically obsolete for 1979 traffic needs.

Contributing to the deterioration of our roads has been the rapidly increasing construction and maintenance costs. In 1968 South Dakota spent \$69 million for highways while in 1978, \$101 million was spent. However, because of inflation and increased construction cost, the 1978 investment purchased 40% fewer miles of highway maintenance and construction. An example of the increase in cost is the 21% increase in 1978. Meanwhile the major source of State highway revenues, the gas tax, took six years, from 1973 through 1978, to increase 21%. For the next few years, highway construction costs are likely to continue their rapid increase while highway revenue most likely will increase much slower. The use of small economy cars, the 55 mile per hour speed limit and the development of more fuel-efficient engines have restricted the increase in

revenue from the gas tax. And resistance to property tax increases has restricted local governmental sources of highway funding.

The people of South Dakota are dependent upon an effective and efficient transportation system. The agricultural and industrial products produced in the state and the supplies which are purchased require transportation service reaching to both national and international markets. The tourism industry is also dependent upon quality transportation services. But the rapidly deteriorating highway system combined with rail abandonment is resulting in a transportation system which is neither effective or efficient. The needs of the state's commerce are not being met.

However this problem has also presented South Dakota with opportunity. That is, the opportunity to design an integrated transportation system which will meet the demands of the 1980's and 1990's.

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