

Canyon County's 'deplorable' pothole patch of I-84 needs immediate attention

BY STEVE RULE

Do you drive I-84 in Canyon County? Do you enjoy the drive?

To be blunt, the section of interstate that connects Nampa and Caldwell is deplorable. Both safety and congestion are serious issues that will only get worse. From 2008-2015, there were 950 crashes in that one stretch of road.

The Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho, COMPASS, is responsible for regional transportation planning for Ada and Canyon counties. In 2014, they asked for your thoughts on this section of I-84. What did they hear?

“The area is in desperate need of repair and widening. Congestion is a mess and the road is totally torn up ... making it a hazard for us the daily travelers.”

“The Nampa-to-Caldwell freeway ... is not just a ‘cosmetic’ concern — it is a real safety issue, which must not be ignored”

“The 3-lane to 2-lane neck-down westbound in Nampa is dangerous ... and congested. While that bottleneck is truly an annoyance, I am more concerned with the road condition”

I agree; so do COMPASS colleagues Nampa Mayor Bob Henry and Caldwell Mayor Garret Nancolas, and the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD). In fact, widening I-84 from the western end of Caldwell to Franklin Boulevard in Nampa is COMPASS' No. 1 unfunded transportation priority, as identified in

Communities in Motion, the region's long-range transportation plan. The good news is that it is No. 1; the bad news is that it is unfunded.

ITD's most current cost estimate for widening I-84 in Canyon County is over \$330 million. That's a lot of money — more than ITD can afford. And it is just one of 32 unfunded transportation needs identified by COMPASS. To make matters worse, the longer we wait, the more all of the projects will cost.

So, what do we do to solve our transportation funding shortfall? While there are no easy answers, options do exist.

- Increase transportation funding at the state level. This could mean an increase in the fuel tax, registration fees, or other funding. While tax increases are never popular, sometimes we must swallow a bitter pill for the long-term good.
- Provide local option taxing authority. This provides authority for local entities to allow their residents to vote to tax themselves — or not — to fund a local project. To do this, we need the Legislature to grant authority to local jurisdictions.
- Pursue competitive grant funding. This strategy is already underway. ITD and COMPASS have applied for competitive grants for portions of I-84. To date, they have been unsuccessful, but they continue to try.

These options are not going to solve our transportation funding shortfall by themselves, but each would provide an additional “tool” in the proverbial toolbox. We're not asking for funding specifically for I-84, but we are asking the Legislature to provide us with tools we can use to solve our transportation funding shortfall.

Canyon County Commissioner Steve Rule is chair of the COMPASS board of directors; Nampa Mayor Bob Henry and Caldwell Mayor Garret Nancolas support this opinion.