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Vehicle Registration Fee Increase Proposed

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Boise, Idaho -- Vehicle registration fees could be on their way up, and by a lot if Gov. Butch Otter gets his way.

His plan was laid before legislators Tuesday and also involved a change in funding for Idaho State Police and increasing rental car tax.

But of those ideas, the one to raise registration fees seems to be meeting the most resistance.

"Demand is up, costs are up," explained Darrell Manning, Idaho Transportation Department. "Income is nearly level."

Most transportation officials will tell you it's because income has remained flat at the Idaho Transportation Department that state roadways are short about \$200 million a year.

The issue is compounded by population growth, which has increased the tax base but has not affected roads proportionally.

"Within the past 10 years, the traffic has increased 99 percent," said Manning. "The sales tax and general funds revenue revenues are both up over 100 percent."

So why haven't transportation coffers grown? Well it could be due to the fact that the gas tax hasn't increased since 1996, and that isn't likely to change so the governor is suggesting one way to increase ITD funding is through raising registration fees to \$150 per vehicle.

"It doesn't really matter if it's a 5-year-old car, or a 2-year-old car, it should be a flat fee," said Clete Edmunson, special assistant to the governor's office.

Currently, registrations range from \$24 to \$48, so the proposal could mean at least a three-fold increase, and that's weighing heavy on the minds of some lawmakers.

Senate pro-tem Bob Geddes says it might be time to think of alternatives.

One option could be to charge the state of Idaho fees and taxes that it avoids with its own fleet of vehicles -- which would force most agencies to reassess their budgets.

"Perhaps they would, but wouldn't it be a great idea if instead of saying I can travel "x" number of miles because I have that 25 cents per gallon more than anyone else on the highway," explained Geddes, (R-Soda Springs), "if every agency had to actually budget, how much they travel, how much they use their state vehicle fleet."

Geddes says it's a simply a question of fairness.

"In the sense that a state vehicle drives on the highway, but is exempted from the fuel tax, that means we're collecting, in my opinion, too much fuel tax from the general public."

Some Idaho lawmakers do agree with the governor's plan. Another who did not was Rep. JoAn Wood (R-Rigby).

Wood said she would not be voting in favor of this plan, and indicated instead the state should start using sales tax from new cars to pay for roads instead of putting that money in the general fund.

Speaking of registration fees, in about a year they'll begin to have negative affect on the **Ada County Highway District as well**. Currently ACHD's most expensive project is the Park Center Bridge -- a \$14 million investment which is now delaying a number of other projects by about a year.

But the biggest challenge is still coming -- it involves a **registration fee, which was approved by voters in 1990. That fee tops out at \$20 for new cars and it's scheduled to expire next year.**

"Those fees that bring in \$4 million a year for highway infrastructure go away starting 2011," said Craig Quintana, ACHD. "So unless we replace those, that means a couple intersection projects are going to have to go, a roadway project will have to go, because that's essentially 10 percent of the building budget that we'd have to live without."

Quintana says the projects on ACHD's 5-year plan won't actually go away without the registration fee, but they would be delayed dramatically.

So he expects a voter initiative in some future election to bring the fee back. The ACHD board will discuss this matter Wednesday night.



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