



## Funding Maine's old infrastructure

*By Phil Hirschhorn* | Posted: Wed 7:50 AM, Nov 13, 2019

**PORTLAND, Maine (WMTW)** - A "Blue Ribbon Commission" of government officials and industry experts is studying ways - beyond the gas tax and tolls - to raise revenue for road and bridge repairs.



Unveiling a new bridge or road in Maine is a rare event. The "Sarah Mildred Long Bridge," here in Kittery, is Maine's newest big bridge. It opened last year. But more than half of Maine bridges are 50-years-old, and a-quarter are 80-years old.

To finance and speed up projects, other states along the I-95 Corridor are relying more on public-private partnerships -- public assets designed, built, and maintained by private firms. That's how this tunnel in the Port of Miami got built...and this one, from Portsmouth to Norfolk, Virginia. Same approach for new bridges over the Ohio River, serving Kentucky and Indiana.

But Maine Transportation Commissioner, Bruce Van Note says those are all higher traffic areas, predicting solid profits for the private partners.

"There may be a couple places in Maine where that could make some sense, but not a lot, because you need a lot of traffic, and we're just so rural, with so many people driving on so many low volume roads, it's not going to have widespread application in Maine," said Van Note.

The only application of a public private partnership we could find in Maine was this roundabout on route 27 in Boothbay...making the road safer and easing traffic flow. It was a three-point-three-million dollar project split by the town, D-O-T, and a private businessman, who owns the country club nearby.

Stephen Sawyer is a Senior Vice President of "Sebago Technics," an engineering and design firm helping to build the expanded Turnpike Toll Plaza under construction in York. He's also a board member and past president of the "Maine Better Transportation Association."

He says one new way to get revenue, tested in other states- is a "vehicle mileage tax." It's tabulated by a device installed on your dashboard. Your tax is based on how many miles you drive.

"With smartphones that we all have, we're being tracked anyway. The answer is not going to be one thing. That's the problem. The problem is too big. You're going to have to have a menu of things that sort of chip away at this problem. So, there's no silver bullet," said Sawyer.

Drivers' license and car registration fees could be raised, too. The "Blue Ribbon" Commission is expected to make its first recommendations next month.

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