

RE: MICHIGAN ROADS

Dear Friends,

The reason I am writing today is to discuss the problems we are having with our roads. I would like to talk about road funding and provide you with some history that will show how our roads got into the condition that they are in today.

First, when I hear the residents and non-residents of our state say that Michigan's roads are terrible, I have to cringe. I cringe because the statement is only partly accurate. The roads of Macomb, Oakland, St. Clair, Wayne, Monroe, and Washtenaw Counties are terrible, and I will tell you why. In southeast Michigan, we have the largest percentage of population, the largest percentage of industry, the highest number of trucks and cars, and the most lane mileage to maintain. However, we do not get the largest part of the funding. I will come back to this point.

I have owned my own business in Macomb County now for 38 years. We do a lot of business in the thumb, northern Michigan, and western Michigan. I have delivery trucks that deliver into these areas on a weekly basis. I will tell you in complete honesty that a vast percentage of the roads in these areas are just fine. In fact, the next time you head north, pay close attention to all of the roads north of route 46. Route 46 crosses our state completely from east to west. I know a lot of these roads like the back of my hand and I assure you that they are in far better shape than the roads of southeast Michigan. I do not want to convey the impression that I want the residents of these areas to have terrible roads or that I want to take their funding away. I want everything regarding road funding to be equitable. However, the status quo as we know it must end now. If it does not, then I will state emphatically that we will never solve our infrastructure problem.

To be frank, most of the time when I bring up the subject of Public Act 51, most people are not aware of what it is. I confess, before I got into politics, neither did I. I had never heard of it before, but I will say that the ramifications of this little known legislation has a great effect on road funding today in our state.

PA 51 is our state's road funding mechanism and it is 67 years old. It was written in 1951, and I would say that our entire infrastructure system has changed dramatically over the last 67 years. To be honest, PA 51 strongly favors rural counties over urban counties, namely Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne. PA 51 stipulates that out of our current road funds, state trunkline roads receive 39.1%, counties receive 39.1%, and cities and villages receive 21.8%. This presents a major problem to our urban areas. Secondly, PA 51 calculates total county "road miles," but does not take into consideration how many lanes the road has. The fair course to take would be to re-write PA 51, but this would cause a huge political problem.

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It would cause a huge problem because the representatives and senators in these rural areas of the state will not want to give up this road funding that they have enjoyed for the last 67 years. Honestly, I do not blame them, because neither would I. Because of the dire situation of our roads in southeast Michigan, I feel that it is time to make a deal, and I mean the type of deal where everyone walks away happy. What we need is some sort of trade off that we could give the residents of the rural counties, such as funding in another area, to get them to give up some of their road funding to be sent into the urban areas. At this moment, I am not sure what that trade off would be, but we in the Legislature must find it. Believe me, the tradeoff is out there.

i In 1997, our state government voted for a .19 cent per gallon increase on all gasoline at the pumps. This money was earmarked for road repair. However, a fatal mistake was made in this legislation. There was not an indexer for inflation inserted into the legislation. Everyone knows that .19 cents in 1997 is not the same as .19 cents today. Secondly, cars are much more fuel efficient today than they were 21 years ago. Therefore, less gas is being used, meaning that there is less revenue coming in for repair of roads. This is just some history but it shows how decisions made 21 years ago can have a real negative effect today.

3 Third, this is a little known fact, but it was not until roughly 2011 that Michigan started using some of the 6% sales tax revenue generated at the gas pumps for road repair. When I arrived in the Senate in 2011, I was astounded by this. The tax revenue from gas all went to our general fund, public education, and local governments. Michigan was only one of eight states in the country not to use revenue from the tax on gas to repair roads. It is time to reprioritize our spending and make infrastructure our number one expense. For far too long (I am talking 20 to 25 years ago) too many other programs and projects were put at the head of the line ahead of road repair. This has to change.

In closing, as stated above, this letter was written to provide some historical perspective relating to our current infrastructure problems. In all candor, this letter could have been another page, as it is such a complicated issue. If you have any suggestions, by all means, please contact me. As always, it is my pleasure and my honor to serve as your State Senator.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jack". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

Jack Brandenburg  
State Senator, District 8