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# Highway fund needs protection

By Roy Merritt Jr. and David Chapman

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Campaign advertisements often feature candidates for office, or issues such as health care, education or foreign policy. Rarely do we see transportation and infrastructure front and center in these ads, but as the need for investment has grown, transportation and infrastructure have inched their way up the list of priorities for Americans.

In Connecticut, we can feel the effects of deteriorating infrastructure each day as we sit in traffic congestion, face more frequent and longer delays, and drive across bridges with weight restrictions posted on them. Our state has the third-busiest road network in the United States, and drivers are more than familiar with bottlenecked areas like Stamford, Bridgeport, Hartford and Waterbury. Areas like these cost drivers more than \$2,300 per year in wasted fuel, lost time and car repairs.

Nov. 6, Connecticut voters will have the opportunity to protect critical funds for transportation by voting "yes" on Ballot Question No. 1. This question proposes to create an amendment to the state constitution that would ensure money in the Special Transportation Fund (STF) is used solely on projects that will improve our transportation networks, and prohibit transportation money from being diverted and used for other purposes. The amendment, if passed by the voters, will secure funding collected through the state's motor-fuels taxes and other related fees in a "transportation lockbox," protecting these funds for roads, bridges and rail – systems that are in need of attention.

This week, the Connecticut Society of Civil Engineers (CSCE) Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers released the "2018 Report Card for Connecticut's Infrastructure," identifying Connecticut's infrastructure shortfalls and successes, and revealing to us just how much our infrastructure needs attention. The Report Card assessed five infrastructure categories and assigned Connecticut an overall grade of C-minus. Included in the Report Card are grades for the state's network of roads, which received a D-plus, and bridges, which received a C-minus. The report card may be found online at [infrastructurereportcard.org/Connecticut](http://infrastructurereportcard.org/Connecticut).

CSCE also offered some solutions. The report noted that overall, Connecticut's infrastructure finished higher on the scale than the national infrastructure grade of a D-plus. However, Connecticut's grades for bridges and roads continue to show that our aging transportation systems are in mediocre to poor condition, and not fulfilling the needs of our residents. Recent investments have not kept pace.

It is crucial that we increase our investments as necessary to bring our transportation systems up to an acceptable grade, boost the competitiveness of our state's economy, and improve the quality of life for our residents. To make this possible, we need to ensure money in the STF solely is allocated toward transportation projects and transportation-related debt relief, instead of being diverted periodically for non-transportation purposes during difficult budget cycles.

The future of Connecticut's infrastructure investments is now up to voters. We urge them to check "yes" on Ballot Question No. 1 to establish a "transportation lockbox" protecting money in the STF. Let's make sure our transportation funds are spent on what they were intended for.

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