With new governors in many states pushing infrastructure investment as a priority and some states seeking new solutions following the failure of statewide ballot measures in November, 2019 could be a big year for transportation funding. If that happens, it would follow the recent trend of significant activity on the funding front during odd-number years. Here’s a look at some of the states most likely to pursue new funding this year.

2019 States to Watch Look to Gas Taxes, Fees, Tolling

- **Alabama:** When state lawmakers return to Montgomery in March, one of the things they’re likely to debate is a gas tax increase to fund road and bridge work, the Associated Press reported. Alabama’s 18 cents a gallon tax, one of the lowest in the nation, hasn’t changed since 1992. A 2017 gas tax bill was unsuccessful. Gov. Kay Ivey is expected to be on board for a gas tax increase this year. House Majority Leader Nathaniel Ledbetter has said an increase is likely to pass during the 2019 session. House Speaker Mac McCutcheon has said traffic congestion along the state’s major arteries needs to be addressed. Senate President Pro Tempore Del Marsh has said a tax increase could be used to make improvements at the Port of Mobile. But voters in November elected one of the most conservative governments the state has ever seen, political analysts noted, and DC-based anti-tax crusader Grover Norquist has already called on lawmakers to resist the urge to raise taxes. And even if an increase is successful, lawmakers reportedly could face a number of battles over how to divvy up the money between the state’s rural, urban and suburban areas, cities and counties, North versus South and congestion relief efforts versus projects to enable new growth. Some Alabama mayors say they’d support changes to the distribution formula for transportation funds, which currently gives half the revenue to state government. Of the remaining revenue, counties receive 80 percent and cities get 20 percent. The Alabama League of Municipalities would like to see cities and counties receive equal shares. Alabama Department of Transportation officials have said the state faces $10 billion in road capacity needs they’re unable to address with current revenues.

- **Colorado:** Voters in November rejected two transportation-related ballot measures that would have earmarked $3.5 billion for roads and bridges or $6 billion for roads and bridges, mass transit and local infrastructure using bonds repaid through either the state general fund or a sales tax increase. Those defeats would appear to narrow the list of options for statewide solutions available to lawmakers this year but Gov. Jared Polis, who was sworn in this week, has said he still sees the need for a “transportation solution for the whole state” and that every idea is on the table other than those put forward in the two rejected ballot measures. In the interim, state department of transportation officials have said they may be forced to make some tough decisions among the $7 billion in needed transportation projects they’ve identified.

- **Connecticut:** Gov.-elect Ned Lamont, who takes office Wednesday, has said he’d like to see tolling on long-haul trucks passing through his state. Connecticut’s neighbor Rhode Island, put truck-only tolls in place last year to help fund a state bridge repair program. But an advisory working group on transportation Lamont set up has had some different ideas, calling for more broad-based highway tolls on all cars and trucks and an unspecified increase in the state’s gas tax.
capital plan released [16] by the state department of transportation last month called for spending $12.1 billion over the next five years to rebuild Connecticut’s highways and bridges and invest in public transportation.

**Idaho:** In his first state of the state address this week [17], newly elected Gov. Brad Little told lawmakers: “Looking long-term, we must address transportation deficiencies. I ask you to join me in looking at these long-term needs – specifically, the safety of our roads and bridges and the necessary improvements to preserve our citizens’ most precious commodity: their time. It is critical that we provide the needed road capacity to get our people and products to their destinations in the most efficient manner.” Little’s predecessor, Butch Otter, told the Boise Metro Chamber of Commerce in November [18] that he regrets not being able to invest further in his state’s infrastructure during his term in office. “If I had one suggestion that I was not able to accomplish that I would like to see the next governor and the next legislature pay more attention to, it’s deferred maintenance,” Otter said. “I have tried to convince, unsuccessfully, the legislature to get more money.”

**Illinois:** Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel is urging lawmakers [19] to increase the state’s gas tax by 20 to 30 cents per gallon [20] to pay for road construction in the state. Emanuel, whose term ends in May, has noted [21] the state hasn’t passed a capital infrastructure bill in 10 years and hasn’t raised the state gas tax since 1990. Governor-Elect J.B. Pritzker is not dismissing [22] the possibility of a gas tax increase but he said last month he doesn’t expect an infrastructure proposal will be among the first orders of business when his administration begins next week. Pritzker did announce [23] the formation last month of his transition team’s “Restoring Illinois’ Infrastructure Committee” to be co-chaired by members of Illinois’ Congressional delegation and the state legislature. Democratic and Republican Senate leaders expressed optimism [24] that a capital bill could be considered this year. In addition to a gas tax increase, some lawmakers have suggested legalization of marijuana could be another potential revenue source. The Illinois Department of Transportation estimates the state will need to come up with $6.5 billion over the next decade just to bring roads and bridges to an acceptable level.

**Kansas:** A task force on transportation has been meeting [25] to come up with suggestions for the state’s next multi-year transportation plan that lawmakers will consider this year. Kansas’ current 10-year program, known as T-Works, is expiring. The panel reportedly has discussed [26] the gas tax, sales taxes, fees for hybrid and electric vehicles, mileage-based user fees and other potential revenue sources. The task force’s final report is due to the legislature by the end of the month.

**Kentucky:** Gov. Matt Bevin is calling on [27] the state legislature to increase the gas tax and fees on fuel efficient vehicles this year to help fund the state’s infrastructure. But 2019 is a short session year for the General Assembly and lawmakers will have just 30 days to pass bills. Since it is not a budget year, the legislature would need 60 votes to raise the gas tax. Bevin did not rule out calling a special session if lawmakers are unable to pass a plan during the regular session. State transportation officials said last year [28] that the Kentucky road fund is taking in nearly $50 million less than it did four years ago and no significant growth in revenues is expected.

**Louisiana:** A coalition of trade groups and other stakeholders hope to convince lawmakers [29] to raise the gas tax in 2019 after an unsuccessful effort in 2017. The coalition has authorized a 20-month digital and social media-focused education and public awareness campaign on the need for better roads and bridges. But they have hopes lawmakers could take up a gas tax increase when they convene in April. State transportation officials said last November [30] the state is at a crossroads and infrastructure will continue to crumble without significant additional funding. A 2017 Infrastructure Report Card from the American Society of Civil Engineers gave the state’s roads a D and bridges a D-plus.

**Massachusetts:** Gov. Charlie Baker, re-elected in November, has said [31] he wants to prioritize transportation during his second term. Baker had previously shown little interest in discussion of new revenues. Back in July, CommonWealth magazine [32] offered a list of revenue options that could be up for consideration, including a millionaire tax, a gas tax increase, regional ballot
initiatives and expanded tolling. Massachusetts was among the first wave of states this decade to raise its gas tax in 2013. An effort to index the tax to inflation was nixed by a 2014 ballot question supported by Baker.

- **Michigan:** Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, who used “fix the damn roads” as a rallying cry during her campaign for the office last year, said in her New Year’s Day inauguration speech: “Let’s fix our roads, and be the state that’s not paralyzed by partisanship, but works together. And create the blueprint for rebuilding America’s crumbling infrastructure.” Whitmer has said she will work with the Republican-controlled legislature to improve the condition of the state’s roads but also has vowed “to use every lever of power” she has to deliver on her campaign promise. Whitmer wants to use a state infrastructure bank capitalized with $2 billion in state tax dollars to help pay for road repairs and leverage additional federal money. She has suggested it might be necessary to ask the legislature to raise road user fees or ask voters to approve a bond to make infrastructure investments possible.

- **Minnesota:** Gov. Tim Walz, who was sworn in this week, has pledged to consider a gas tax increase and has nominated as his transportation commissioner the woman responsible for the state’s last funding increase, former House Speaker Margaret Anderson Kelliher, who presided over the legislature’s override of then-Gov. Tim Pawlenty’s veto of a gas tax increase in 2008. But a projected budget surplus of $1.5 billion could complicate the arguments for a gas tax increase this year.

- **Mississippi:** State department of transportation officials hope 2019 will bring additional funding to help them with the enormous task of maintaining roads and bridges. Gov. Phil Bryant called a special session last summer during which legislators came up with an infrastructure funding plan that included a $300 million bond issue, a new state lottery, taxes on hybrids and electric cars and internet sales taxes. But transportation officials say they need much more to address the state’s chronically neglected infrastructure. Mississippi DOT Commissioner Dick Hall is reportedly calling for an increase in the state’s gas tax, which hasn’t been raised since 1987.

- **Missouri:** State lawmakers are reportedly uncertain over how to address Missouri’s infrastructure needs going forward in the wake of the defeat of a ballot measure that would have increased the state’s gas tax. Gov. Mike Parson had campaigned for the measure, which was estimated would have brought in $437 million annually. The task ahead is made more difficult for state officials since Missouri has a constitutional amendment that requires most tax increases to go to a statewide vote. Voters previously rejected a statewide sales tax hike for transportation in 2014. Missouri ranks 46th in road funding. Republican Rep. Jeff Messenger has introduced legislation (HB 406) to index registration fees to inflation. Republican Sen. Dan Hegeman has said other options to fix the state’s transportation funding gap could include expanded tolling and perhaps a slight hike to the fuel tax that wouldn’t require a vote of the people. Missouri has an estimated $825 million in unfunded road and bridge needs.

- **North Dakota:** Lawmakers will consider a bill (SB 2061) that would implement an annual $248 fee on electric vehicles and a $71 fee on hybrids.

- **Ohio:** During his 2018 campaign, Gov. Mike DeWine suggested he would appoint a blue-ribbon commission of citizens and experts to make quick recommendations on infrastructure. DeWine didn’t rule out the possibility of raising taxes if the commission were to recommend that.

- **Wisconsin:** Newly elected Gov. Tony Evers said he plans to offer a potential transportation funding solution as part of his first budget. Evers has nominated an advocate of raising revenue to lead the state department of transportation, lobbyist Craig Thompson of the Wisconsin Transportation Development Association. Road funding was a major focus of Evers’ campaign for governor last year against Scott Walker, who in a video ad that appeared on screens at gas pumps claimed (falsely) that Evers supported raising the gas tax by as much as a dollar a gallon.

**Further Reading**
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The biggest issues for states to watch in 2019, such as infrastructure funding and transportation policy, are discussed in this article. The article cites several sources, including Governing magazine and Bloomberg, to highlight the challenges states face in 2019.

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