

Minn. party leaders start miles apart on gas tax, fees for roads and bridges

The GOP-led Senate and DFL-controlled House proposals for the state's next two-year transportation budget differ by more than \$800 million.

That's largely due to disagreements over whether Minnesota needs to raise taxes to address its aging infrastructure.

Democrats say yes. They want increased taxes on gas and auto sales and higher tab fees to pay for hundreds of millions in new annual spending on infrastructure projects.

"We need a reliable and sustainable transportation funding system that can weather the storms of recession and budget deficits and to keep up with the needs of our growing state," Rep. Frank Hornstein, D-Minneapolis, said before the House approved the plan late last month.

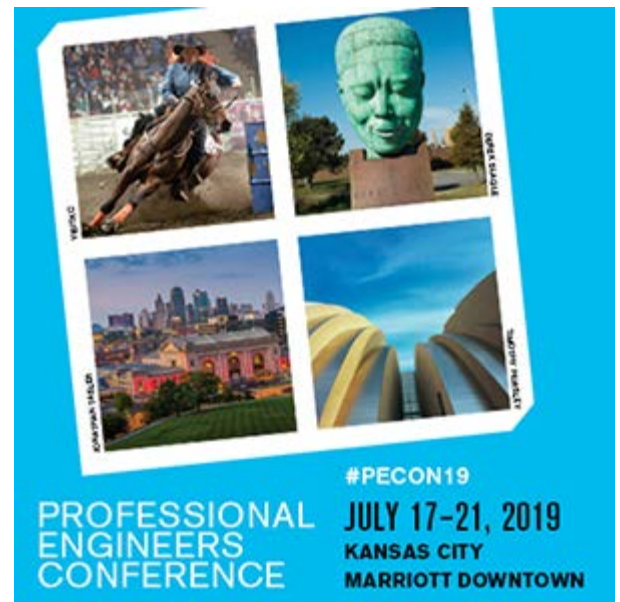
Republicans want to use existing resources — including general fund money — to continue to chip away at a backlog of road and bridge work.

"Our budget makes a substantial investment in maintaining the safe and reliable infrastructure on which we all depend — without raising those three transportation-related taxes," Sen. Scott Newman, R-Hutchinson, who chairs the transportation committee, said after the Senate approved his plan May 1.

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