

# The Morning News

## Local News for Northwest Arkansas

Print Page

### Road Funding Panel Needs To Think Big, Murphy Says

By [Rob Moritz](#)

THE MORNING NEWS

LITTLE ROCK — A panel studying ways to generate more money for state highway improvements in the state should think big — \$8 billion or more — and not settle for anything less, state highway commissioner Madison Murphy said Wednesday.

"If we're all going to be here and you've got a lot of smart people, and a lot of time and effort, let's solve the problem," Murphy, of El Dorado, said after a meeting of the Arkansas Blue Ribbon Committee on Highway Finance.

Highway officials have said the state needs at least \$200 million a year to maintain current road conditions and up to \$1.9 billion annually to address improvement needs projected to cost \$19 billion over the next decade.

Committee members discussed a variety of potential revenue sources to pay for improvements Wednesday, from increasing state fuel taxes to tapping the state's general revenue to pay for improvement to Arkansas' 16,000-mile highway system, the 12th largest in the nation.

Murphy told the panel it would have come to an agreement on what the money would be spent on before it could find a revenue source.

"Someone said you've got to have a program that makes sense," he said. "Makes sense to folks here, in the Legislature and the citizenry."

Murphy suggested building a "four-lane grid system" connecting all areas of the state to interstates, which he said would cost about \$8 billion.

"As far as economic development and trying to do something as an investment for this state, that's it," he said. "It's what we don't have.

"It's what puts us at an economic competitive disadvantage to our surrounding states. It's what makes it difficult for us to attain ... industry and move goods and people safely across the state. And, it makes it very difficult to recruit to the state."

During the meeting, the panel endorsed a recommendation by its chairman, Sen. John Paul Capps, D-Searcy, that a new task force be created to assist the committee in finding a funding source.

The task force would include representatives from the trucking industry, automotive industry, oil marketers, railroad and other groups that would have a working knowledge of the state's transportation needs and possible funding sources.

Earlier Wednesday, two subcommittees met - one looking at possible new funding and the other at ways to tap existing revenue streams. Both committees discussed the need for additional funding and reviewed a variety of funding sources. Both committees also agreed that whatever they decide it must be long term.

"We need to hit some type of range that goes beyond our needs so somebody in 10 years isn't deliberating the same thing," said Rep. John Lowery, D-El Dorado, chairman of the subcommittee looking at tapping existing revenue streams.