

Gunnison County Roads & Bridges Initiative

GUNNISON
COUNTY

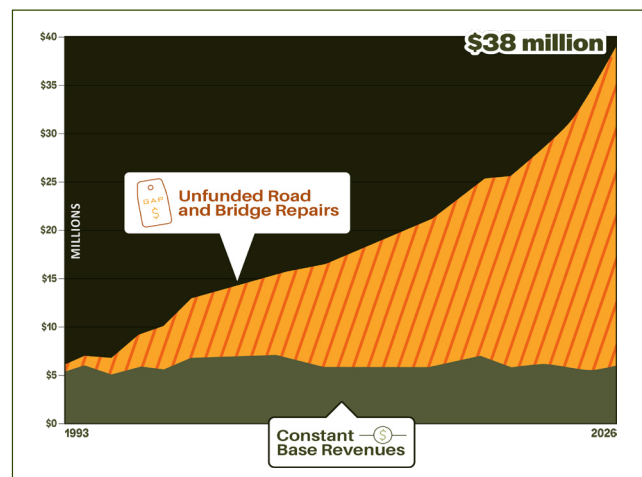
Where We Are Today

Gunnison County's Roads & Bridges system is at a critical inflection point. After decades of flat or declining purchasing power and rising costs, the County is now managing a **\$38 million backlog** of deferred road and bridge maintenance.

This backlog did not emerge overnight. It is the result of a long-term structural imbalance between revenue and cost:

- The County's primary road funding source, the Highway User Tax Fund (HUTF), **has not kept pace** with inflation or modern transportation demands.
- Construction, materials, and labor **costs have increased** significantly, particularly since the pandemic.
- The County's effective purchasing power for road maintenance has declined by roughly **25% since COVID**.

As a result, the County has been forced to make difficult tradeoffs—completing fewer maintenance treatments each year and allowing more roads to fall into disrepair. Today, the impacts of that gap are visible across the system.



What the Data Tells Us

In 2025, Gunnison County enlisted an independent engineering firm to complete an AI-driven, objective, data-driven assessment of all County roads:

- **Only 36% of roads are in good condition**
- **Multiple bridges are in poor or fair condition**, requiring attention
- **System-wide deterioration is accelerating** without intervention

This analysis allows the County to prioritize investments strategically, but it also confirms that the system is underfunded relative to need.

Why This Matters: Safety, Cost, and Daily Life

Deferred maintenance is no longer just an infrastructure issue; it is a community safety and quality-of-life issue. Residents are experiencing the impacts directly:

- Washboarding, potholes, and failing surfaces **create unsafe driving conditions**
- **Emergency response times can be affected** on deteriorating roads
- **School bus routes**, cyclists, and daily commuters face increased risk
- Residents are **paying an estimated \$800 more per year** in vehicle wear and tear due to road conditions

In short, while taxes have remained relatively unchanged, residents are already paying—just in less visible and less efficient ways.



Visit the project website to share your feedback.

inputcentral.com/gunnison-county-roads-initiative

Why the Current Funding System Falls Short

A key part of this conversation is helping the public understand what cannot be done under current funding structures:

PROPERTY TAXES CANNOT BE USED FOR ROADS

There is a common misconception that property taxes fund road maintenance. In reality, **general fund property taxes cannot be used for roads and bridges** unless specifically approved by voters. This significantly limits the County's ability to redirect existing revenues to address the backlog

EXISTING SALES TAX IS RESTRICTED

Gunnison County's existing sales tax (approved in 1978) is legally restricted. **It can only be used for capital projects. It cannot be used for ongoing maintenance**, which is where the greatest need exists. This creates a structural gap: the County can build infrastructure, but lacks a sustainable way to maintain it.

REVENUE HAS NOT KEPT UP WITH DEMAND

The County has not increased its sales tax since 1978, and the Highway User Tax Fund has stayed relatively flat since the 1990s. Meanwhile, traffic volumes, visitation, and infrastructure demands have all increased significantly. Costs have outpaced revenue for decades.

What We Are Considering: A Dedicated Half-Cent Sales Tax

In response to these challenges, the Board of County Commissioners is considering a 0.5% (half-cent) countywide sales tax increase dedicated specifically to roads and bridges. This approach is being explored based on community input, data, and long-term needs. The potential half-cent sales tax is grounded in several core principles of practicality and fairness:

IT CREATES A DEDICATED, RELIABLE FUNDING SOURCE

A sales tax could be structured to be **dedicated exclusively to roads and bridges**, provide a predictable, ongoing funding stream, and ensure funds are used for maintenance—the County's greatest need. This allows for long-term planning and a systematic approach to addressing the backlog.

IT DISTRIBUTES COSTS MORE FAIRLY

Unlike other funding options, **a sales tax ensures that visitors and seasonal users** contribute to maintaining the roads they use. It reduces the burden on full-time residents, and it reflects the reality that Gunnison County's infrastructure supports a regional and tourism-based economy.

For every 10 cents of sales tax collected in Gunnison County, here's how it is distributed:

Gunnison County: 1¢

Gunnison County only keeps .7¢ of each cent collected; the rest is returned to the municipality where it was collected.

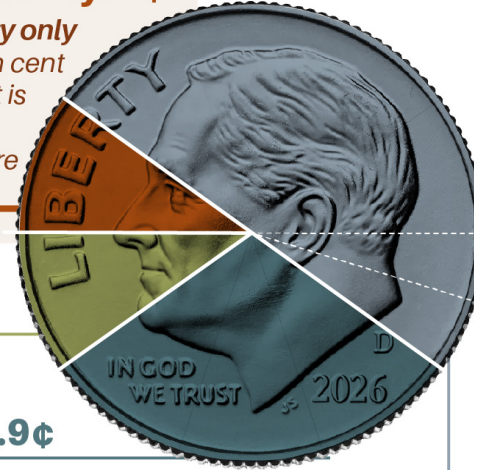
RTA: 1¢

State of Colorado: 2.9¢

Municipality Tax

Town of Mt. Crested Butte: 5¢
Town of Crested Butte: 4.5¢
City of Gunnison: 4¢

Municipal portion dependent on where purchase is made



IT UNLOCKS ADDITIONAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

One of the most important advantages of a local funding source is leverage: Many state and federal grants require a local match. Without dedicated funding, Gunnison County is often unable to compete for larger funding opportunities. **A stable revenue source allows the County to stretch local dollars further via state and federal grants.** In other words, local investment can multiply into significantly larger total investments.

IT SUPPORTS A LONG-TERM, RESPONSIBLE PLAN

The goal is not a short-term fix—it is a 20-year, phased strategy to address deferred maintenance, preserve existing infrastructure, prevent future backlogs, and deliver improvements efficiently and strategically. **Investing earlier reduces long-term costs and avoids more expensive reconstruction later** (which can reach \$3 million per mile).

