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America's infrastructure is so bad, gravel roads are making a comeback

By Richard Read | The Car Connection

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You know it, we know it, even [people in Algeria](#) know it:

America's infrastructure is in a sad state.

How sad is it? America's infrastructure is in such a sad state, gravel roads are [making a comeback](#).

That might sound like a punch line from the world's dullest, policy-wonkiest comedian, but unfortunately, it's no joke.

A step backwards

The change in infrastructure policy has been most obvious in Omaha, Nebraska, one of America's 50 largest cities. Like other municipalities large and small, Omaha has grown in recent years, and with that growth has come the realization that roads serving once-suburban neighborhoods weren't built to code. Cracks and potholes are commonplace.

Omaha's Department of Public Works determined that it would cost some \$300 million just to repair those ailing residential streets. But the city hasn't sought more funding from state or federal sources to do so. No, it's taken steps to get to the root of the problem--literally--by grinding those crumbling streets into gravel, claiming that gravel streets are far easier and cheaper to maintain.

City residents who'd been hoping that officials would come up with an outside-the-box solution aren't amused.

But so far, Omaha has stood by its decision. It has determined that the cost of maintaining roads in residential areas should be borne by the homeowners that live on those roads. (Never mind the pesky fact that residents pay taxes to ensure that roads remain up to snuff.)

In some cases, residents have been able to raise some of the money needed for repairs, and officials have agreed to chip in a portion from the city. As you might guess, though, that strategy doesn't work well for homeowners in poorer areas of town.

Sadly, Omaha isn't alone. Pavement-to-gravel transitions have taken place in the majority of states--27, according to a study

[published last year](#) by the Transportation Research Board.

The issue affects communities large and small, from coast to coast. _____

So, what's to be done?

Based on a

[quick poll](#) we conducted last autumn, most of you think that new taxes are required to fix America's crumbling highways and byways. Some like the idea of a higher federal gas tax (which, after all, it hasn't been raised since 1993). Others think that a pay-as-you go tax for motorists would be the most equitable.

Whatever the case, a plan is needed soon, and it ain't going to be cheap. President Trump knows that, and he's said that he's planning to ask Congress for [\\$1 trillion](#) to repair the U.S. infrastructure.

A couple of weeks ago, we would've thought his odds on getting such a bill passed were pretty good. Trump, of course, is a Republican, and enjoys fairly healthy support among members of his own party. Furthermore, infrastructure spending is popular with Democrats, so there'd some opportunities for bipartisan cooperation.

In the wake of last week's healthcare debacle, though, Trump clearly exacerbated some tensions within the GOP. Making the pitch for a 13-figure ask--especially an ask for a project likely to be unpopular with Republicans, who'd prefer to slash spending--will now be very, very tricky.

For people in Omaha and elsewhere, the timing is crucial.

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