

**2010 TRANSPORTATION BOND QUESTION 3 WILL HELP RIDOT
SERVE RHODE ISLANDERS BETTER**

By, Michael P. Lewis, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Transportation

Every two years the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) asks the public to partner with us and approve a transportation bond referendum. This year RIDOT is asking voters do the same thing by voting yes on Question 3 so that we can continue to improve our State's network of roads and bridges.

Approval gives RIDOT 20 percent of the funding required to leverage the dollars that the Federal government provides (the other 80 percent) for new construction projects. Without these bonds Rhode Island transportation projects would come to a virtual halt as there would not be enough dollars to pay the cost of construction.

There is no other immediate source of funding for our transportation initiatives. If Rhode Island doesn't spend these Federal dollars another state will.

Many pieces of Rhode Island's infrastructure are reaching what could be called middle age. Baby boomers know all too well what happens when they turn 50 or more – things start to wear out and more attention has to be paid to what we'd always taken for granted. The same holds true for our transportation system.

Harsh weather, ever increasing traffic volumes, and even things like the flooding we experienced in March chip away at our once solid foundation. And while every road and bridge that is open to traffic is safe for travel, maintaining what we have has become more important than ever.

The referenda's \$84.7 million will provide \$80 million to RIDOT, directly funding improvements on the State's highways, roads and bridges, as well as \$4.7 million that will purchase new RI Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) buses and rehabilitate older ones, too.

With these funds RIDOT expects to invest in projects from Westerly to Woonsocket. Examples of what can be done include the replacement of the I-95 Providence Viaduct and weight restricted I-95 Pawtucket River Bridge, resurfacing of Hope Street in Bristol and Route 44 in Chepachet, and the replacement of the Cove/Escape Bridge in Portsmouth. Overall construction will include road, bridge and bike path repavings, reconstructions, rehabilitations, and repairs.

The 2008 bond initiative provided Rhode Islanders with improvements to vital projects such as the Union Avenue Bridge replacement project in Providence, the resurfacing of I-95 between Exit 3 in Richmond and Weaver Hill Road in West Greenwich, and the repair of Round Top Bridge in Burrillville. These dollars went into commuter rail and helped to build the InterLink at T.F. Green Airport and the upcoming Wickford Junction Commuter Rail Station in North Kingstown. They even went into a statewide RI-LEAP local roads program that made local roadway improvements in nearly all 39 cities and towns.

And with all the improvements come jobs. According to the Federal Highway Administration, Question 3 is expected to employ over 5,000 people in construction related jobs. In turn, those jobs help drive the economy forward, creating additional state revenues through related goods and services.

RIDOT wants to continue to improve our roads and bridges. A middle-aged transportation system should grow old gracefully and remain a productive member of society and not necessarily have to worry about joint repair and bridge replacements. The aches and pains

our system suffers, however, are a by-product of having one of the oldest transportation systems in the country.

The approval of Question 3 means a Federal investment in Rhode Island of \$423 million for a State share of just 20 cents on the dollar. That is a sound investment in our future and one that will go a long way towards making middle age more manageable.

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