

Strengthened infrastructure plan passes the House

Special to The Clinton Courier

In a vote of 103 to six, the Mississippi House of Representatives passed Senate Bill 3046, adopting a stronger version of the Building Roads, Improving Development and Growing the Economy Act (BRIDGE) passed earlier by the Senate.

Enactment of this measure will dedicate a new annual income stream to cities and counties for road and bridge maintenance. A new diversion of state use-tax collections will direct funds back to the cities and the counties to be used for road and bridge maintenance.

This move is a redirection of existing dollars.

"Our plan uses real money, without growth triggers, to address this pressing issue faced over the entire state," said Speaker of the House Philip Gunn. "As we have said before, our legislation is one of the best things we've done for local government."

The House bill makes strides on the local and state levels for infrastructure improvements.

Use-tax is gathered from sales tax collected on any out-of-state purchases, including those made online. Approximately \$310 million was collected last

year. The new diversion will divert thirty-five percent of use tax collections, which is approximately \$108 million by today's estimates, to cities and counties for road and bridge repair.

Five percent of all use tax collections (approximately \$15.5 million by today's estimates) will permanently fund the Local System Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program.

"We want to put money back into the hands of the local people," said Speaker Gunn. "This increases the diversions back to cities and counties, which is something our mayors and supervisors have been requesting for years."

The House maintained what the Senate deemed, the Strategic Infrastructure Investment Fund (SIIF). However in the House version, the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) will administer the funds in this separate account on projects throughout the State.

The SIIF is comprised of one percent of the Rainy Day Fund, car tag monies and revenue bonded Gaming Sinking Fund dollars. This money exists separately from MDOT's annual appropriations.

In addition to the SIIF, the House legislation also authorizes \$100 million in general obligation bonds for projects over the entire state.

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