Sessions presses efforts to better highway system

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Providing adequate funding to properly maintain and improve Idaho's 5,500-mile highway network has always been one of the top priorities of Rep. John O. Sessions, R-Driggs.

Sessions, House Transportation Committee chairman, is looked on by his colleagues as the voice on highways and as one who has done more to bring about highway improvements than any other lawmaker in the state.

He also has been the target of critics because it takes a lot of money to build these highways. As a result he has had to spearhead gas tax and vehicle registration fee increases, which, although not universally popular, is viewed by vitally necessary by the vast majority.

"Idaho lives and works as result of a good highway system," he said in a Post-Register interview.

Idaho's gas tax, at 14.5 cents this year, was one of the highest in the nation. Other states are now belately raising their taxes so Idaho's is nearing the average. Washington State, for example, raised its state tax to 16 cents last July and it goes to 18 cents in July 1984.

Actually, by raising gas taxes and improving highways in recent years, Idaho saved millions of dollars, since labor, material and equipment costs since have been escalating rapidly.

Sessions said, "Basically people like good safe roads to travel on and will generally support paying the necessary taxes to get them so long as those fees and taxes are being well spend.

"With Idaho being an exporting state of agriculture, timbering and mining products and a growing tourist industry, a good and adequate system of highways is in effect the backbone of the whole economy. It is much better to provide the necessary funds when needed rather than to play catchup later after needs and prices have increased."

Sessions said he felt the Idaho Transportation Board had generally done a good job in administering the state highway programs.

In retrospect, he added, he feels there were three most significant highway improvement projects in eastern Idaho in the last several years.

They include demolition of the old Thornton overpass and completion of the divided highway north from Rigby through Rexburg; demolition and replacement of the old steel bridge structure across the Snake River on Highway 26 near Swan Valley; and improvements and rerouting of Anderson Street and Lewisville Highway within the city of Idaho Falls.

Politics

Construction Co., Inc. $188,500, removing and relacing superstructure on westboard lanes of Lindsay Boulevard Structure in Idaho Falls, to be done about Sept. 15.

Interstate 15 between Osgood and Roberts, Kloepler, Inc., $203,900, seal coating Interste 15 about 15 miles, just completed.

Ashton Main Street, H-K Contractors, $436,00, about 60 percent done rebuilding Main street and installing storm sewer and sidewalks, to be finished Sept.1.

Ashton Hill Guardrail, Frank Morgan Company Contractors, $115,300, just started work to install 7,100 feet of new guardrail north of Ashton on U.S. 20 and to be completed about Sept. 15.

North Sugar City to St. Anthony, Bannock Paving Co., $5,951,000, excavating roadway through St. Anthony and crushing gravel for six miles freeway, to be completed in fall of 1984.

Henry's Fork Bridge in Ashton, Goodwin Construction Co., raising girders and deck on north end of structure, to be completed within next three weeks.

Last Chance North and south, Encon Corp., $668,600, new plantmix surfacing and seal coating, project just finished.

Dubois to China Point, Asphalt Sales Contractors, $165,200, sealcoating about 13 miles of Interstate 15, project just started.

Monteview Road, Robert V. Burggraf Co., $893,400, rebuilding five miles on north end, sealcoating just done with roadway shoulders and slopes to be reseeded this fall.

North Fork to Montana Line, Asphalt Sales Contractors, $421,700, sealcoating done on some 20 miles on Highway 93.

Mackay Reservoir North, Western Construction Co., $858,200, Shoulder widening and plantmix done, with seeding of shoulers to be completed about Oct.

White Bridge in Teton County, Cannon Structures, Inc., $116,200, rebuilding 75 foot bridge over Teton River on Cedron-Chapin Road, project to be done about Sept. 1.

Irwin Maintenance Yard, Kloepfer, Inc., $173,600, crushing and stockpiling roadmix and overcoat material at yard, project half done.

Highway 26 for 2.2 miles between St. Leon Road and Beeches Corner northeast of Idaho Falls, H-K Contractors, $392,700, work underway and expected to be finished about Sept. 20.

Highway 33 for five miles between Canyon Creek and Clementsville, H-K Contractors, $1,420,900, rebuilding five miles of road with construction done last summer, seal coating underway and reseeding of shoulders and slopes to be done this fall, to be completed about Oct. 1.

ern Idaho that could be mentioned," he said, adding that these projects benefited the public the most.

"There still remains much to be done. I refer specifically to the badly-needed divided highway between Idaho Falls and Rigby on Highway 26. There is also the Granite Hill project on Highway 26 west of Swan Valley, which has one of the state's highest highway accident rates.

"Many of these projects are either under way or in the near future programming stage."

Under construction, and in various stages of completion in eastern Idaho, are 17 projects costing more than $13 million. They are topped by the divided highway between Sugar City and St. Anthony costing $5,951,000; the highway from Canyon Creek to Clementsville, $1,420,900; and 17th Street in Idaho Falls, $1,184,866.

Scheduled for 1984 are eight projects at a cost of close to $16.5 million. Four projects are planned for 1985, at a cost of over $7 million.

Sessions is serving his ninth term in the Legislatyre, and from the point of service, is one of the oldest. He owns a grocery owner, but has left its management and that of the Teton West Motel in Driggs largely to his sons.

He calls himself mostly retired but finds that his legislative, business and other interests keep him busy. Projects planned for 1984 follow.

Highway 26 between Granite Hill and Swan Valley, realigning, replacing and plantmix for four miles, $6.5 million (special federal funds).

State Highway 33 for five miles reconstruction and plantmix pavement, $3.1 million.

Interstate 15 for 8.5 miles of resurfacing between Roberts and Sage Junction, $2 million.

Reconstructing short-span Siddoway, East Teton, and Enterprise canal bridges on State Highway 33, $270,000.

Highway 15 between China Point and Pleasant Valley, resurfacing about 9 miles, $1,250,000.

State Highway 47 at Warm River, removing overpass and surfacing 26 miles, $140,000.

U.S. 93 on Trail Creek north and south, widening and resurfacing for 7.2 miles, $950,000.

Great Western Canal Bridge on U.S. 20, replacing bridge $80,000.

Highway A2, for 5.1 miles between Dubois and Kilgore, reconstruction, $800,000.

The highways under contract this year, contractor, contract amount, description, and status , respectively follow:

Riviera interchange to Broadway and Yellowstone Ave in Idaho Falls, Burggraf Contractor, $202,704, sealcoating various roadways in and around Idaho Falls, project virtually completed.

Seventeenth St. in Idaho Falls, Harcon, Inc., $1,184,866, Rebuilding 17th St. Railroad underpass and roadway between Yellowstone and Rollandet, placing drainage pipes and constructing railroad overpass, to be done about Oct. 1.

Lindsay Boulevard, Severance