

Editorial: Stop raid on state transportation trust fund

Lawmakers' plan threatens jobs and road projects

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At the beginning of March when the Legislature convened, lawmakers targeted job creation and economic development as a priority.

While the debate over whether government can accomplish that worthwhile goal — witness the arguments over the federal stimulus package — one program has a proven track record of success: road construction.

The House and Senate are now engaged in negotiations over the state budget, reconciling the almost \$2 billion gap in spending between the chambers.

The initial House budget, at \$67.2 billion, called for a giant raid on the state's transportation trust fund, shifting \$466 million to spending in other areas. The Florida Transportation Commission projected 88,000 jobs would be threatened with delays in road-building projects over the next five years.

On Monday, the House dropped the amount to \$160 million, yet that total could cost the state 11,000 jobs, according to the Florida Transportation Builders' Association.

The organization decried the lesser raid as still a “devastating blow to an already strained industry.”

The association planned to protest Tuesday with a rally at the Capitol.

While the Senate's nascent \$69.4 billion budget did not dip into the transportation trust fund, chamber negotiators caved Monday and agreed to the House's smaller highway robbery — albeit reluctantly, according to Sen. J.D. Alexander, the chamber's chief budget writer.

The Legislature's economic track record to date includes a “Jobs for Florida” bill that gives tax credits and other incentives to business.

One Democratic lawmaker dubbed the trust fund raid the “Job Killer Act of 2010.”

If the Republican-controlled Legislature is determined to boost a staggering state economy, already saddled with massive job losses in the construction industry and a record high

unemployment rate, a transportation trust fund raid will drive the economy in the wrong direction.

Since the Senate could not rein in the House on this issue, we urge Gov. Charlie Crist to veto this raid with his line item power should it land on his desk. Florida's economy is too fragile.