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## **Advocates fail to agree on how to pay for roads**

**By Matthew Santoni**

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Officials warned Friday that a \$472 million transportation funding shortfall threatens roads, bridges and transit systems around the state, but few advocates could agree on how to fix it.

About 100 people came to Gateway High School in Monroeville for the last of seven hearings held by the state House to discuss the deficit left by the federal government's rejection of tolls for Interstate 80, and more than two dozen were signed up to testify.

Some suggested a higher gas tax or higher vehicle registration fees; some advocated for privatizing sections of roads and re-applying to toll Interstate 80; others pleaded for legislators to take chances in an election year and raise taxes or fees.

"I have heard perhaps 15 solutions, and I'm sure you have heard more," Jonathan Robison, president of the Allegheny County Transit Council, told the gathering. "What is needed is leadership to negotiate a consensus."

The Allegheny Conference on Community Development and its affiliate, the Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce, want the legislature to allow public-private partnerships that would let private companies lease and run state roads or provide public services, said Ken Zapinski, senior vice president for transportation for the conference.

But Rick Bloomingdale, president of the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO, and Pat McMahon, president of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 85, oppose such partnerships, which Bloomingdale said put the companies' profits ahead of the public's safety and best interest.

PennDOT District 11 Executive Dan Cessna said Allegheny, Beaver and Lawrence counties need about \$469 million a year to maintain their state-owned bridges and roads, but will get only \$295 million next year. Fewer new projects are being planned, and bridges will soon go back to deteriorating faster than they can be fixed or replaced, he said.

"One of the most fundamental roles of state government is to provide adequate transportation funding and infrastructure, and we are failing miserably at that," said Chad Amend, president of the Monroeville Area Chamber of Commerce.