

905,000 the year before.

The occupancy tax, which funds the majority of the tourism agency's annual budget, had its largest increase during the quarter that ended Aug. 31, when revenue grew 9 percent to nearly \$376,000, compared

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lives are valuable. So if we have to detour to around bridges, it adds to our costs, which subsequently we pass on to our customers."

Leonard's Express operates some 210 trucks and has 600 trailers nationwide, so the additional cost of rerouting vehicles and increasing man-hours can be steep, he said. Johnson, who also serves as chairman of the state Motor Truck Association, pointed out a lack of funding to fix deficient bridges as part of the problem. He advocates an increase in the fuel tax to cover bridge rehabilitation costs, among other things. "Firewall it so it goes to a dedicated highway fund, dedicated to maintaining, repairing and expanding the infrastructure in New York," he said.

Though he would like to see an across-the-board increase for all drivers, he said at least if it could be done fairly, he would agree to only a tax increase on diesel fuel. "Unfortunately, in our current political environment there's very little agreement when you start talking increased taxes, so that it's met off pretty quick," Johnson said.

He said a fuel tax increase is the most appropriate way to raise funds for infrastructure repair because it is efficient to collect. "It doesn't require additional bureaucracy to collect it. It's collected at the wholesale level; there's a minimal number of wholesalers nationwide," he explained. Any increase in the tax would not result in any increase in the cost of collecting it, would go straight to the highway fund."

Foot to economy

A recent survey by the National As-

tions, the Finger Lakes Visitors Connection is looking to increase hotel rates and suggests replacing flat rates with ranges that let prices rise in response to demand. Another goal is to boost the number of visitors from November to April, particu-

sociation of Manufacturers and Building America's Future shows that a majority of manufacturers believe American infrastructure is in fair or poor shape, with roads in particular getting worse.

"Infrastructure: Essential to Manufacturing Competitiveness" reports that 70 percent of respondents say roads are getting worse and 65 percent do not believe infrastructure will be able to meet the demands of a growing economy over the next 10 to 15 years.

The report projects that freight tonnage will increase 88 percent by 2035 and passenger miles traveled will increase 80 percent in the next three decades.

The deteriorating condition of our transportation infrastructure and the threat that aging infrastructure poses to our competitiveness provide a strong justification to invest in infrastructure, the report states. Johnson agrees.

"The highways are where we conduct our business," he said. "We're reliant on them being taken care of. The way the fed-

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smaller firms, the survey found.

Responses to the findings could include informing younger generations about the future job opportunities to encourage development of the needed skills, providing custom training to get an employee up to speed faster, and having colleges and training providers work together to assess the needs of the community and fill the skills gap.

For training purposes, the survey found,

million in local taxes and \$10.5 million in state taxes in 2012.

Source: Tourism Economics, The Economic Impact of Tourism in New York State, Finger Lakes Focus, 2012 Calendar Year

eral government conducts business when it comes to highway infrastructure, it's a broken system that needs to be fixed."

The Reason Foundation recently released a study showing that the aging interstate highway system will need to be reconstructed over the next two decades to the tune of \$1 trillion, including \$600 billion in rebuilding costs and \$400 billion to add capacity.

The study suggests the cost could be covered almost entirely by toll revenues generated by charging drivers and truckers via all-electronic toll collection on the rebuilt interstates. The foundation, a non-profit think tank dedicated to public policy research, concludes that in 37 states, modest toll rates would be enough to cover 90 percent of costs associated with reconstruction.

But in states like New York and California, higher toll rates would be required to cover those costs. That likely would not go over well with motorists here, who balked last year when the state proposed increas-

on-site classes were preferred by nearly 70 percent of respondents, and college courses for training were preferred by only 20 percent of employers.

The survey partners hope the initial success will prompt an increase in support.

"We are going to be sending a link to the report to everyone that responded the first time, and so then they are going to get a chance to say, 'Hey, you know, you didn't disappear into a black hole someplace,'" Gardner said. "There were some people who said, 'I didn't have time' last time. Maybe (now they will

region's success.

"Tourism marketing and development is big business with big benefits in the region driven by professionally trained people who specialize in it," Knoblauch said. "We are sales tax generators."

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ing Thruway tolls.

Whether bridge reconstruction and rehabilitation is paid for through fuel tax increases or alternative mechanisms such as tolls or vehicle mileage tax systems, funding must be found, Adams said.

"At some point, in order for us to actually take care of the infrastructure, make sure our bridges are safe, ensure that we are investing in issues that are occurring now as well as potentially into the future, we're going to have to pay for that in some sense," she said.

With the state's priority on preservation, its bridges are not getting any younger, and the DOT is doing what it can with the money available, Post said.

"The reality is, as with any business, our resources for bridge and road construction and maintenance are finite. Statewide there are many needs," she explained. "A measure of success is how well you manage those resources to get the job done effectively."

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say), 'I'll make time for it next time.'"

For local workforce support organizations such as RochesterWorks, the data from the survey meets a need.

"It's more important for us to have surveys that are local, that deal with the local economy (of) the whole Finger Lakes region," Pecor said. "National studies will give you some trends, (but with this survey) we can give the job seekers a lot of information, and hopefully it's a tool to take (them to) the next step."

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