

Capital funding for roads one-third of 1970 level

Funding for roads inadequate - BRC

By Dave Chmara

Travelled on any highways lately? Noticed any bumps, cracks or other flaws on them?

Chances are you have - and no wonder as provincial government spending on roads has reached an all time low.

For the 1988-89 budget year, total provincial budget road expenditures was 5.4 per cent.

The Better Roads Coalition (BRC) has been leading a public awareness campaign to inform Ontarians about the current state of Ontario's roads and highways.

The BRC was formed in 1987 when a number of road users felt the public must be made more aware of the state of Ontario's roads.

The BRC is made up of individual associations and trade groups such as the Canadian Automobile Association, the Ontario Trucking Association, the Ontario Motor Coach Association and the Canadian Industrial Transportation League.

Its chairman, Harold Gilbert, is the former Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Transportation for the Province. It was because of this, as well as Gilbert's concern regarding the low priority being given to Ontario's roads, the BRC executive asked him to be chairman of the Coalition.

The Coalition feels that if the public is more aware of the road situation throughout Ontario, they will say to their elected representatives at all levels of government that they are deeply concerned that the system is at a crisis stage and they want something done about it.

Although road expenditures dropped to an all time low for 1988-89, vehicle registrations increased to an all time high, the result being that in 1987, the total vehicles registered was 5.635 million - an increase of 29 per cent in four years.

During a BRC conference held in early April this year in Thunder Bay, the Coalition reaffirmed its dedication to the improvement and expansion of Ontario's road system.

The BRC says many of the actions taken in the 1970s towards improving traffic situations such as paving shoulders and passing lanes were carried out with full recognition that more permanent solutions, such as four laning, would have to follow.

During the BRC's Thunder Bay conference, Gilbert said, "with truck and automobile traffic increasing as it has, many sections of the once quite adequate Trans Canada Highway now require four laning. If we are going to continue to promote tourism, as well as making other developments in the north competitive in the world market, then our road system is vital to meeting this objective."

Gilbert also mentioned that Minister of Transportation, Ed Fulton, in a recent speech, made reference to the need for improving our roads to decrease the increasing accidents in our province.

Gilbert said, "since 94 per cent of our travel is by road, our entire lifestyle is dependent on our roads. Therefore, unless we are prepared to make a long term commitment to our road system, our lifestyle, as we know it and enjoy it today, will have to change."

It is the hope of the BRC that

when the public becomes more aware of what is happening to our road system, they will say to governments at all levels, "It is not enough to just make an announcement in regard to the intentions to carry out a major project such as a Highway 407 or a Highway 69 widening, what is needed is an increased financial commitment to allow these types of projects to proceed without allowing the rest of the road system to deteriorate."

Provincial Minister of Finance, Robert Nixon, recently announced an additional expenditure of \$2 billion spread out over the next five years.

Money will be used for supporting highway capital projects,

- 13.5% in 1970-71

* The 1988 increase in taxes on gasoline of 1 cent on unleaded and 4 cents on leaded brought an additional \$100 million to the provincial coffers

* Vehicle registration is continuing to climb while the budget percentage is declining.

- In 1983 there were 4.356 million vehicles and in 1987 the total was 5.635 million vehicles.

* Vehicle registration between the years 1970 and 1987 increased by 85 per cent.

* There has been large increases in highway usage with the average Ontarian increasing the number of kilometres driven today by more than 50 per cent

since 1970.

* If current trends continue, commercial vehicle traffic is expected to increase by 80 per cent over the next decade.

* The cost of building one kilometre of a new four lane road is approximately \$2 to \$2.5 million.

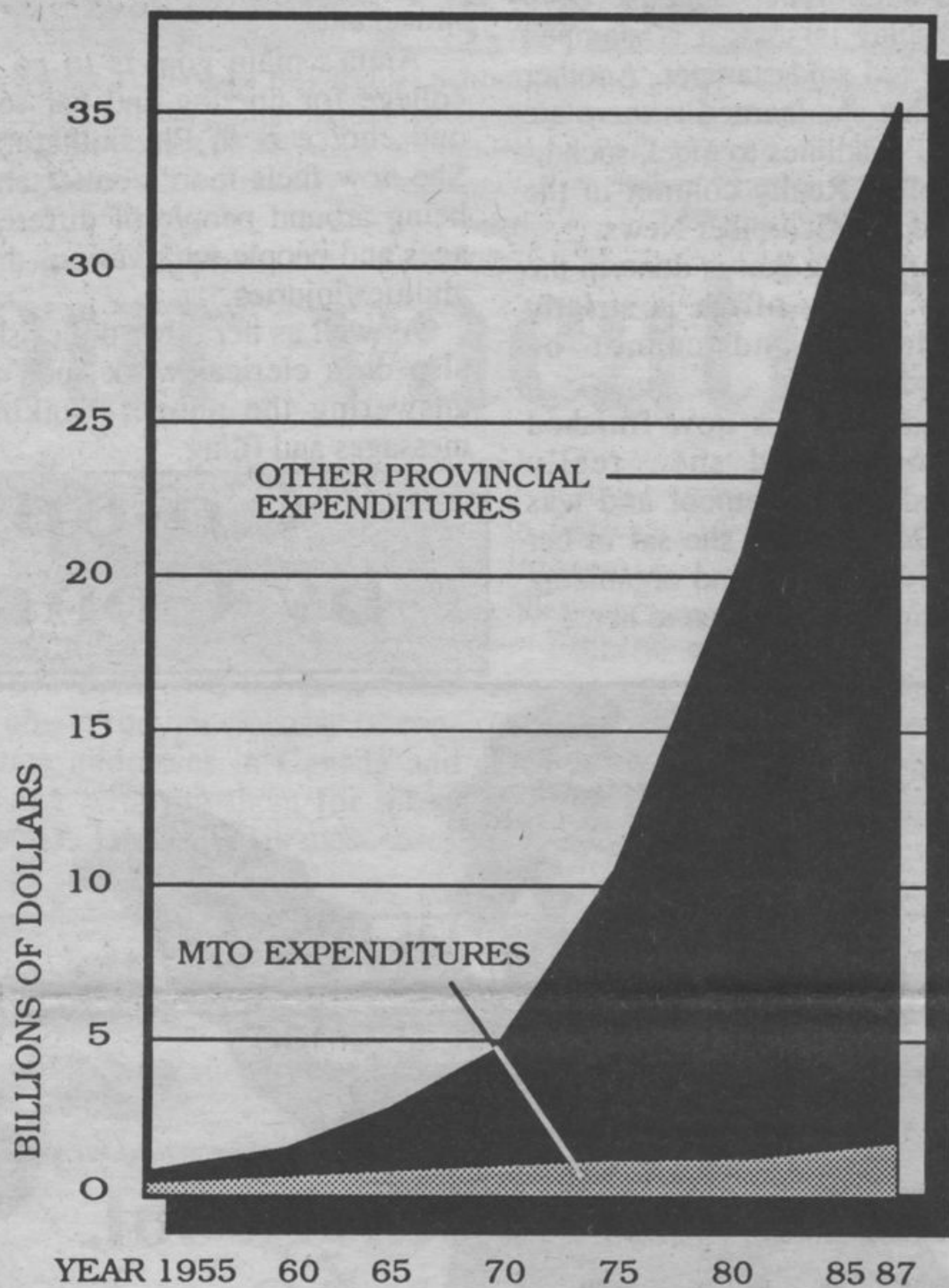
* To expand an existing two lane road to four lanes costs approximately \$600,000 per kilometre.

* By 1990, indications are that 32.5 per cent of Ontario's 11,684 bridges will need to be replaced or rehabilitated.

* Tourism is a major industry in Ontario and poor, congested roads have a detrimental effect on the number of people who visit

Ontario.

* Government figures reveal that within two years 50 per cent of all the roads and highways in Ontario will be in fair or poor condition.



major municipal roads and transit projects including additional GO Transit service in the Toronto area.

In an effort to raise the \$2 billion, Nixon has raised gasoline taxes immediately by 1 cent per litre on unleaded and leaded fuel. Effective January 1, 1990, the gas tax again increases by 1 cent per litre on all fuel.

Also, effective August 1, 1989, annual registration fees increase by 20 per cent or more. Fees for passenger cars and commercial motor vehicles weighing 3,000 kg or less and used for personal purposes increase to \$33 from \$27 in Northern Ontario.

Fees for driver's licences (for a three year period) increase to \$30 from \$21 effective August 1, 1989.

Beginning June 1, 1989, a tax of \$5 will be charged on the purchase of each new tire, including those installed on new vehicles.

Finally, effective July 1, 1989, new fuel inefficient passenger cars (i.e. those with highway fuel consumption ratings of 9.5 litres or more per 100 km) are subject to a tax payable on purchase of at least \$600 and possibly as high as \$3,500.

Road Facts and Figures

* The Provincial budget expenditures for transportation for the following years was:

- 5.6% in 1989-90
- 5.4% in 1988-89
- 5.5% in 1987-88
- 6.2% in 1983-84

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Summer Office Hours

Summer office hours for the Contact North/Contact Nord access site in Terrace Bay from June 5 to July 31 will be as follows:

Tuesday: 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.
Thursday: 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.

Commencing August 1st a new office hours schedule will be posted.

A preliminary list of credit courses to be offered in the fall by colleges, universities and high schools over the Contact North network will be available at the site by the end of June.

You are invited to attend an Open House at your access site on Tuesday, August 8th.
A teleconference is scheduled for 8:00 p.m. and a representative from a number of educational institutions will discuss their fall programming.

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