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Republicans Bristle At Whitmer's 'Road Ahead' Address, Despite Her Calls For Road Funding Negotiations

DETROIT – Although the theme of the day for [Governor Gretchen Whitmer](#) at the Detroit Auto Show seemed to be bipartisanship in an era of divided government, Republicans in Lansing had a less charitable view of her intentions.

In her "Road Ahead" speech at Huntington Place Wednesday morning, Whitmer said although negotiations between herself and House [Speaker Matt Hall](#) (R-Richland Township) on a long-term road funding plan didn't work out in 2024, she wants to renew the conversation to hammer out a deal this year.

"Speaker Hall has said roads are a priority. Last fall, we started working on a long-term solution, but we didn't quite get there. He's said his caucus wants to keep working on this, and so do I," Whitmer said in her speech. "To my partners in the Legislature: let's get back to the negotiating table and hammer out a bipartisan deal to get this done in 2025."

Whitmer's road bonding program will expire this year, and although she's emphasized the need for a concrete replacement, she has yet to present a plan of her own to the public.

Republicans have called for the use of the higher-than-expected state revenue for the coming fiscal year to fund road repairs and upkeep and have also proposed slashes to other state programming to fund a plan without raising taxes.

Hall himself unveiled a \$2.7 billion funding plan at the end of 2024, relying in part on directing soon-to-expire appropriations for the

Strategic Outreach and Attraction Reserve fund towards road improvements.

Whitmer's speech was the latest iteration of her role in the road funding saga: after making proposals that failed under the Republican Legislatures of her first term and being able to administratively establish the bonding option, her remarks Wednesday showed a new urgency to find a new funding source and what is needed to make it happen.

"Fixing the damn roads means we all need to recognize some hard truths," she said in her speech. "To my friends in the GOP: fixing the roads in a sustainable way means looking for new, fair sources of revenue. We can't just cut our way to better roads. Defunding public safety or public health is not the way to fix potholes. To my fellow Democrats: fiscally responsible cuts will need to be a part of the solution. Michigan families and businesses have already tightened their belts because of high costs. We should do the same and focus our resources on the stuff that matters most: roads, schools, safety."

The message didn't go over as well with some Republicans, however. Senate [Minority Leader Aric Nesbitt](#) (R-Porter Township) responded to Whitmer's speech in a video blaming Democrats for the state's problems, saying that Hall and the House Republican majority would "start to clean up the mess made by Whitmer and Democrats."

"Gov. Whitmer just gave another rosy speech asking you not to believe your own eyes — to not believe that our roads are crumbling, our schools are failing, and our families are falling further and further behind," Nesbitt said in the video. "But by every metric, they are. And by every metric, Democrat control of Lansing was a disaster. Our roads, our schools, and our economy all rank in the bottom 10 nationally."

Greg Manz, spokesperson for Hall, responded to Whitmer's speech with a statement on Hall's funding plan.

"Speaker Hall has been consistent in his commitment to providing value for taxpayer dollars by fixing our roads responsibly. Back in November of 2024, he made it very clear that Michigan deserves a solution that prioritizes local and county infrastructure without taking more hard-earned dollars from taxpayers," Manz said in the statement. "That's the plan he put forward then — and it's the plan that remains on the table now. We're hopeful the Governor will finally see that a pothole-free path doesn't require further burdens on hardworking Michigan families."

Speaking to reporters on the floor of the auto show after her speech, Whitmer said although she can't quantify precisely how close she and Hall were to a deal on the matter before the close of the legislative session last year, she feels the discussions provided a positive jumping-off point for this year.

"I would say we had a lot of productive conversations. The Republican leader put forth something, put his name on it," Whitmer said. "No one had done that before, so I give him credit for that. And I think that that's a good place to continue from where we left off last year."

– By Lily Guiney

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