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Sonoma County Ranks in Top Third for Gas Taxes Per Mile, Near Bottom For Road Conditions

Since its inception, Save Our Sonoma Roads (SOSroads.org) has questioned why Sonoma County roads are so much worse than other county roads in California.

The primary reasons given by county officials have been that Sonoma County is disadvantaged by the state gas tax allocation formula and that it has a large road network compared to others in the San Francisco Bay Area.

While Sonoma County's road system is the largest in the bay area, from a state-wide perspective 13 counties have larger road systems. Several have over twice as many miles as Sonoma County's 1,383 miles.

SOSroads has analyzed the state gas taxes received by each county in California for the fiscal year that ended on June 30, 2013 (Table 1). This information is available on the California Controller's web site.

We were surprised to discover that Sonoma County ranks 18th of 58 California counties in terms of gas tax revenue per mile. Sonoma County received \$12.86 million, which is about \$9,300 per mile for its road system.

We replicated this analysis for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2008 in the event that the ranking had changed during recent years. Sonoma County had an identical ranking five years ago.

About 70 percent of California counties (40 counties) get less tax revenue per mile and almost all have roads in much better condition. Fresno County receives about \$6,000/mile and its Department of Public Works and Planning reports a Pavement

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Condition Index (PCI) of 67 for a 3,500 mile county road system. Tulare County achieved a PCI of 70.5 in 2012 with \$4,100/mile for a 3,000 mile county road system. Butte County achieved a PCI of 65 in 2010 with \$5,400/mile. Its county road system has 1,303 miles and 500 bridges, remarkably similar to Sonoma County.

With state gas tax funding in the top 30% of counties, we might expect that our roads would at least be average, which according to the California Statewide Local Streets and Roads Needs Assessment (January 2013) would be a PCI of 66. But that study reported that Sonoma County has a PCI of 50, eighth from the bottom.

Sonoma County's PCI of 50 is misleading because that study blends city streets, which are in much better condition, with county roads. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission reports a PCI of 44 for Sonoma County roads, not including city streets. We cannot release the comparable PCI data for the 58 county-only roads at this time, but the comparison indicates that our county roads have a viable claim to rank worst in California.

The supervisors concluded in June 2012 that 751 of Sonoma County's 1,383 road miles are failed or in poor condition. Only 200 miles are funded long-term to maintain the pavement in good condition, although an additional \$8 million has been budgeted in the past and current fiscal years to improve non-primary roads. Many roads are falling apart and will eventually deteriorate to gravel or dirt.

SOSroads.org will continue to investigate why Sonoma County has such poor road conditions while ranking in the top third for road funding. Many explanations (large road system; state gas tax formula that disadvantages Sonoma County; roads were originally constructed poorly) do not seem to withstand scrutiny.

While many of our roads have inadequate foundations, it is likely that similar construction methods were used in other counties, unless our road system was built in an earlier era. This seems implausible.

High rainfall is a possible factor, but Humboldt County has far more rainfall and achieved a PCI of 64 in 2012 with \$4,400/mile. Other suggestions include Sonoma County's hilly terrain poses road maintenance challenges compared to flatter counties, its roads experience exceptionally high use because of visitors, and the costs of contract labor to maintain roads here is higher than in other parts of California. These possibilities are worth investigating, but without hard data we have to regard them as speculation.

More funding is needed to dig out of Sonoma County's massive pot hole, and the work on 67 miles of county roads this summer is a very meaningful step forward.

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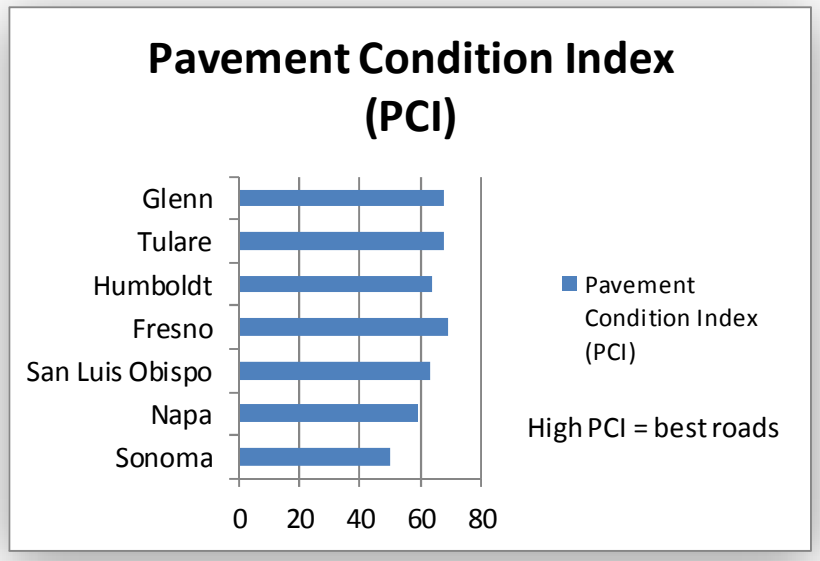
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Understanding how and why our county road system became so dilapidated is key to accountability to ensure that we get the best results for our future investments.

SOSroads.org is an all-volunteer Sonoma County-wide citizens' group formed to advocate for an improved allocation of public funds to roads. Learn more about Sonoma County roads SOSroads.org.

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Figure 1



Making roads a priority

Table 1
Highway Users Tax by County
(FY 2007-08 and FY 2012-13)

Counties	Registered Vehicles (2012)	County Miles (2012)	State Gas Tax (2012)	Gas Tax (2012) \$/Mile	Tax Rank (2012)	State Gas Tax (2007)	Gas Tax (2007) \$/Mile	Tax Rank (2007)
ALAMEDA	1,204,473	472.31	26,676,000	56,479.85	2	19,898,000.00	42,129.11	2
ALPINE	2,385	134.96	528,000	3,912.27	44	498,000.00	3,689.98	30
AMADOR	51,620	410.68	1,987,000	4,838.32	34	1,354,000.00	3,296.97	34
BUTTE	215,467	1,303.03	7,036,000	5,399.72	30	4,805,000.00	3,687.56	31
CALAVERAS	68,424	689.64	3,067,000	4,447.25	35	1,983,000.00	2,875.41	37
COLUSA	27,425	713.92	2,111,000	2,956.91	56	1,287,000.00	1,802.72	56
CONTRA COSTA	893,097	659.84	20,880,000	31,644.03	6	15,651,000.00	23,719.39	6
DEL NORTE	25,824	300.88	1,158,000	3,848.71	45	750,000.00	2,492.69	45
EL DORADO	204,768	1,079.17	7,750,000	7,181.44	23	6,152,000.00	5,700.68	21
FRESNO	706,326	3,523.97	21,268,000	6,035.24	28	14,135,000.00	4,011.10	28
GLENN	34,199	861.85	2,565,000	2,976.16	55	1,574,000.00	1,826.30	55
HUMBOLDT	142,402	1,206.38	5,328,000	4,416.52	36	3,465,000.00	2,872.23	38
IMPERIAL	160,355	2,567.86	8,233,000	3,206.17	50	4,799,000.00	1,868.87	54
INYO	27,010	1,129.81	3,147,000	2,785.42	57	1,948,000.00	1,724.18	57
KERN	676,454	3,323.67	21,310,000	6,411.59	26	14,349,000.00	4,317.22	27
KINGS	102,854	944.09	3,825,000	4,051.52	42	2,405,000.00	2,547.43	44
LAKE	81,259	615.58	2,999,000	4,871.83	33	2,032,000.00	3,300.95	33
LASSEN	35,562	881.04	2,812,000	3,191.68	51	1,849,000.00	2,098.66	50
LOS ANGELES	7,224,166	3,218.70	160,902,000	49,989.75	4	123,051,000.00	38,230.03	3
MADERA	125,270	1,525.16	5,579,000	3,657.98	46	3,453,000.00	2,264.02	46
MARIN	228,986	419.87	5,776,000	13,756.64	12	4,311,000.00	10,267.46	12
MARIPOSA	26,966	560.41	1,843,000	3,288.66	49	1,178,000.00	2,102.03	49
MENDOCINO	107,148	1,010.80	4,277,000	4,231.30	39	2,793,000.00	2,763.16	40
MERCED	198,882	1,726.96	7,334,000	4,246.77	38	4,632,000.00	2,682.17	41
MODOC	13,134	985.27	2,581,000	2,619.59	58	1,656,000.00	1,680.76	58
MONO	16,607	684.42	2,068,000	3,021.54	53	1,416,000.00	2,068.91	52
MONTEREY	341,197	1,242.60	9,822,000	7,904.39	21	6,826,000.00	5,493.32	23
NAPA	133,114	446.40	3,792,000	8,494.62	20	2,695,000.00	6,037.19	20
NEVADA	120,919	562.86	3,929,000	6,980.42	24	2,893,000.00	5,139.82	24
ORANGE	2,462,049	307.15	30,331,000	98,749.80	1	17,513,000.00	57,017.74	1
PLACER	372,567	1,057.26	11,231,000	10,622.74	17	8,427,000.00	7,970.60	17
PLUMAS	31,828	679.49	2,698,000	3,970.63	43	2,074,000.00	3,052.29	36
RIVERSIDE	1,684,174	2,423.61	40,198,000	16,586.00	9	29,544,000.00	12,190.08	9
SACRAMENTO	1,168,704	2,207.51	29,820,000	13,508.43	13	22,381,000.00	10,138.57	13
SAN BENITO	54,897	383.63	1,896,000	4,942.26	31	1,234,000.00	3,216.64	35
SAN BERNARDINO	1,588,670	2,787.43	40,058,000	14,370.94	11	29,150,000.00	10,457.66	11
SAN DIEGO	2,596,747	1,932.83	59,656,000	30,864.59	8	43,994,000.00	22,761.44	8
SAN FRANCISCO	464,332	930.75	11,103,000	11,929.09	14	7,786,000.00	8,365.30	14
SAN JOAQUIN	560,415	1,669.20	14,925,000	8,941.41	19	10,356,000.00	6,204.17	19
SAN LUIS OBISPO	277,927	1,333.23	8,484,000	6,363.49	27	5,809,000.00	4,357.09	26
SAN MATEO	665,649	315.54	14,878,000	47,150.92	5	11,540,000.00	36,572.23	5
SANTA BARBARA	358,262	873.29	9,659,000	11,060.47	15	7,028,000.00	8,047.73	16
SANTA CLARA	1,480,784	634.73	32,557,000	51,292.68	3	23,943,000.00	37,721.55	4
SANTA CRUZ	234,649	599.74	6,569,000	10,953.08	16	4,843,000.00	8,075.17	15

Counties	Registered Vehicles (2012)	County Miles (2012)	State Gas Tax (2012)	Gas Tax (2012) \$/Mile	Tax Rank (2012)	State Gas Tax (2007)	Gas Tax (2007) \$/Mile	Tax Rank (2007)
SHASTA	204,692	1,191.19	6,773,000	5,685.91	29	4,766,000.00	4,001.04	29
SIERRA	5,348	391.28	1,168,000	2,985.07	54	824,000.00	2,105.91	48
SISKIYOU	62,902	1,360.91	4,518,000	3,319.84	47	2,990,000.00	2,197.06	47
SOLANO	359,819	585.25	8,535,000	14,583.51	10	6,146,000.00	10,501.50	10
SONOMA	471,708	1,382.75	12,855,000	9,296.69	18	9,040,000.00	6,537.70	18
STANISLAUS	430,302	1,521.18	11,907,000	7,827.48	22	8,369,000.00	5,501.65	22
SUTTER	90,176	760.43	3,261,000	4,288.36	37	2,106,000.00	2,769.49	39
TEHAMA	66,536	1,089.25	3,615,000	3,318.80	48	2,232,000.00	2,049.12	53
TRINITY	19,980	692.30	2,120,000	3,062.26	52	1,440,000.00	2,080.02	51
TULARE	343,137	3,040.60	12,582,000	4,138.00	40	7,835,000.00	2,576.79	43
TUOLUMNE	71,840	608.08	2,966,000	4,877.65	32	2,137,000.00	3,514.34	32
VENTURA	725,993	543.83	16,945,000	31,158.63	7	12,738,000.00	23,422.76	7
YOLO	173,409	758.98	4,945,000	6,515.32	25	3,346,000.00	4,408.55	25
YUBA	63,660	654.85	2,677,000	4,087.96	41	1,748,000.00	2,669.31	42
Totals	30,287,449	65,918.40	759,513,000	11,522.02		545,177,000.00	8,270.48	

State gas tax data can be found at http://www.sco.ca.gov/ard_payments_highway.html

Figure 2

