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Higher auto fees would go to transportation improvements

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ALBANY, N.Y. -- Gov. George Pataki wants to pump billions of dollars into improvements in the state's transportation system, and motorists should expect to pay through the grill for better roads and bridges.

Increases in motor vehicle registration and title fees, and other charges by the state Department of Motor Vehicles, would generate \$258.2 million in new revenues. Pataki's proposed 2005-06 executive budget Tuesday said the money should go into the state's dedicated fund to pay for transportation system maintenance and improvements.

The higher vehicle fees are part of a massive \$36.6 billion, five-year capital plan Pataki proposed for highways, bridges, rail facilities, airports, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and transit systems outside the MTA region.

Pataki said \$19.2 billion should go to the MTA transit system, which carries more than 7 million commuters a day in and around New York City. To help pay for those improvements, Pataki Tuesday proposed increasing mortgage recording fees levied in the 12-county MTA region by 10 cents for every \$100 in recorded mortgage value.

The MTA already plans a new fare hike late this winter.

The rest of the long-term capital plan _ \$17.4 billion _ would go to non-MTA transportation system improvements, under Pataki's proposal.

Traditionally, the state has tried to balance its upstate-oriented highway and bridge system capital funding with the downstate MTA's capital plan.

To help pay for the bridge and highway improvements, Pataki proposed a passenger vehicle registration fee increase of 33 percent. Owners of the heaviest passenger vehicles would see 75 percent registration increases. The registration fees for passenger vehicles last went up in 1991.

Commercial vehicles would see 25 percent registration increases.

The DMV's generation of title fees would go from \$10 to \$50 under Pataki's proposal and from \$10 to \$20 for a duplicate fee. Those fees were last raised in 2003.

Between the registration and title fee increases, Pataki said the state could generate \$242 million more a year for road and bridge improvements when the charges are fully implemented.

Pataki also proposed increases in the cost of temporary registration fees charged by auto dealers from \$2 to \$5 and on inspection fees for salvaged vehicles from \$100 to \$150.

To help fund improvements on the state Thruway Authority and on Interstates 84 and 287, the Thruway Authority has approved a 25 percent toll hike for passenger vehicles and 35 percent increase for commercial vehicles starting May 1, 2005.

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