

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 25, 2006

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Wixom Closing Emphasizes Need to Fix Michigan's Crumbling Transportation System

LANSING, MICH. — The closing of the Wixom Assembly Plant is just another example of what will happen if we continue to allow the state's infrastructure to crumble, the Michigan Infrastructure & Transportation Association (MITA) announced today.

“As a state we can no longer wait until it is too late to offer infrastructure fixes, regulatory structure reforms, tax incentives and whatever else it takes to help companies like Ford Motor Company be successful in Michigan,” said Mike Nystrom, vice president of government and public relations for MITA, which represents over 800 major highway and bridge contractors. “When the interstate highway system was started by President Eisenhower 50 years ago, it was used to pull the country out of the post-war depression. Our governor and legislature have to use the same philosophy to bring Michigan back to the economic power it can be.”

Among the many reasons the Wixom plant will be idled is the fact that it suffered from antiquated highway ramps on the plant's main traffic interchange, Wixom Road and Interstate 96. The ramps and intersection were designed when the area was a rural community and still have not been repaired and upgraded to give improved interstate access to and from the Wixom Plant.

“Unfortunately, Michigan is currently facing a \$700 million annual funding gap between the amount available for transportation projects and what is needed to adequately maintain and improve roads and bridges,” said Nystrom, who heads a coalition that is seeking increased transportation investment at the state level. “The state legislature has used budget shortfalls as an excuse to transfer transportation funding to other departments, creating an even greater shortage.”

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Nystrom added that with a considerably lower gas tax in comparison to neighboring states and the fact that Michigan continues to donate transportation dollars at the federal level, the current funding is not adequate. Fuel efficiency in new vehicles as well as increased use of alternative fuel vehicles could also affect future user fee income from fuel, creating an even larger gap.

“What this all means is that the persistent under-funding of Michigan’s roads, bridges and transportation infrastructure stifles new economic growth and endangers Michigan jobs, as evidenced by the Wixom Plant closing,” Nystrom said. “We must find a long-term funding solution to maintain a solid transportation system that encourages economic growth and keeps jobs in Michigan. Perhaps if the Wixom Road and Interstate 96 intersection had received funding to make necessary repairs and upgrades, Wixom might have had a better chance at surviving Ford’s recent restructuring efforts.”

MITA represents a broad spectrum of the state’s underground, bridge and highway construction companies. For more information, visit www.mi-ita.com.

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Editor’s Note: Mike Nystrom, vice president of government and public relations for MITA, is available for interviews to discuss transportation issues. Please contact MITA to arrange an interview.