OFFICE *of*
PROGRAM RESEARCH
WASHINGTON STATE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Washington Transportation Budget: A Broader Context (Looking at Other States)

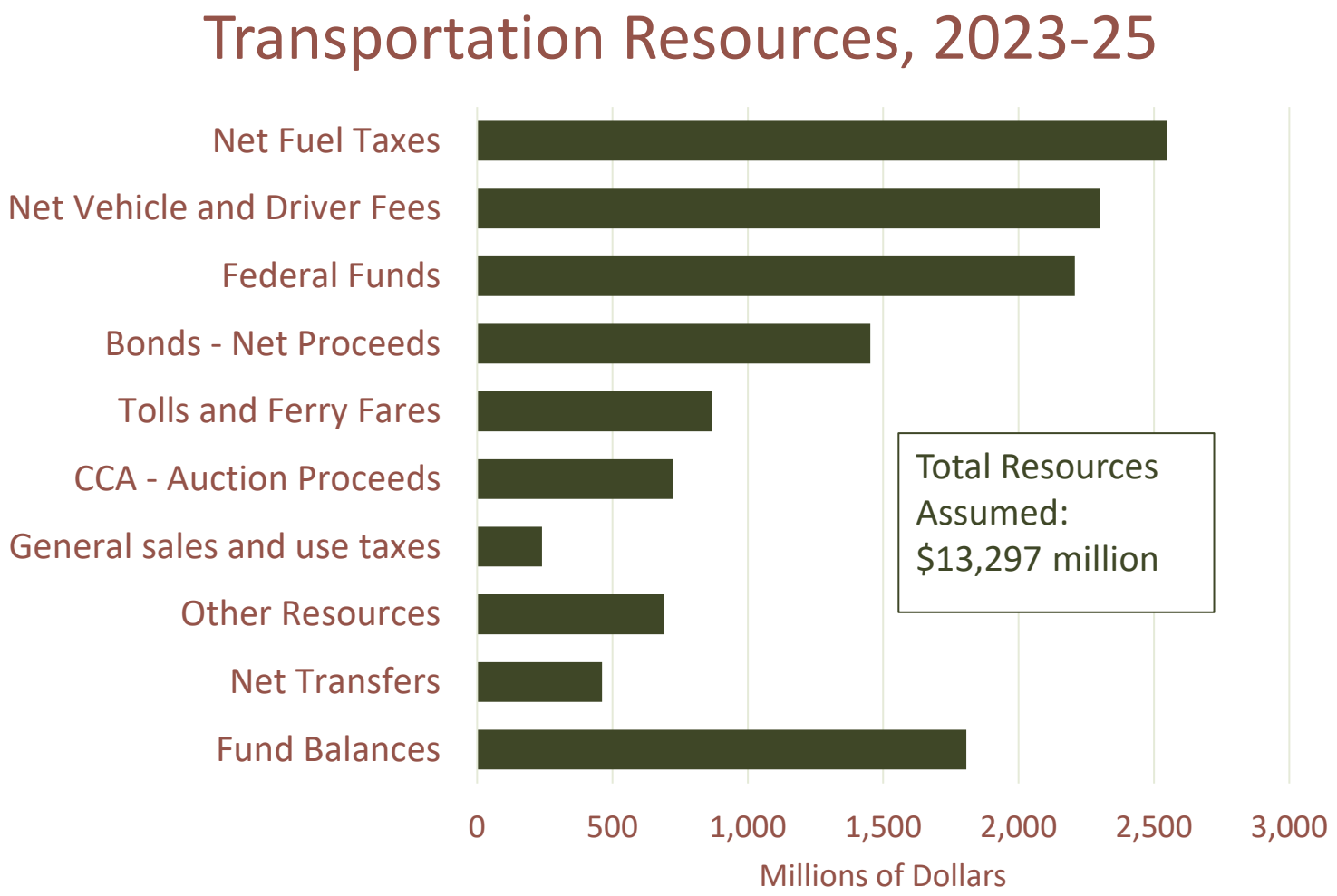
Are the Washington Transportation Budgeting Constraints and Challenges Unique?

May 19, 2026

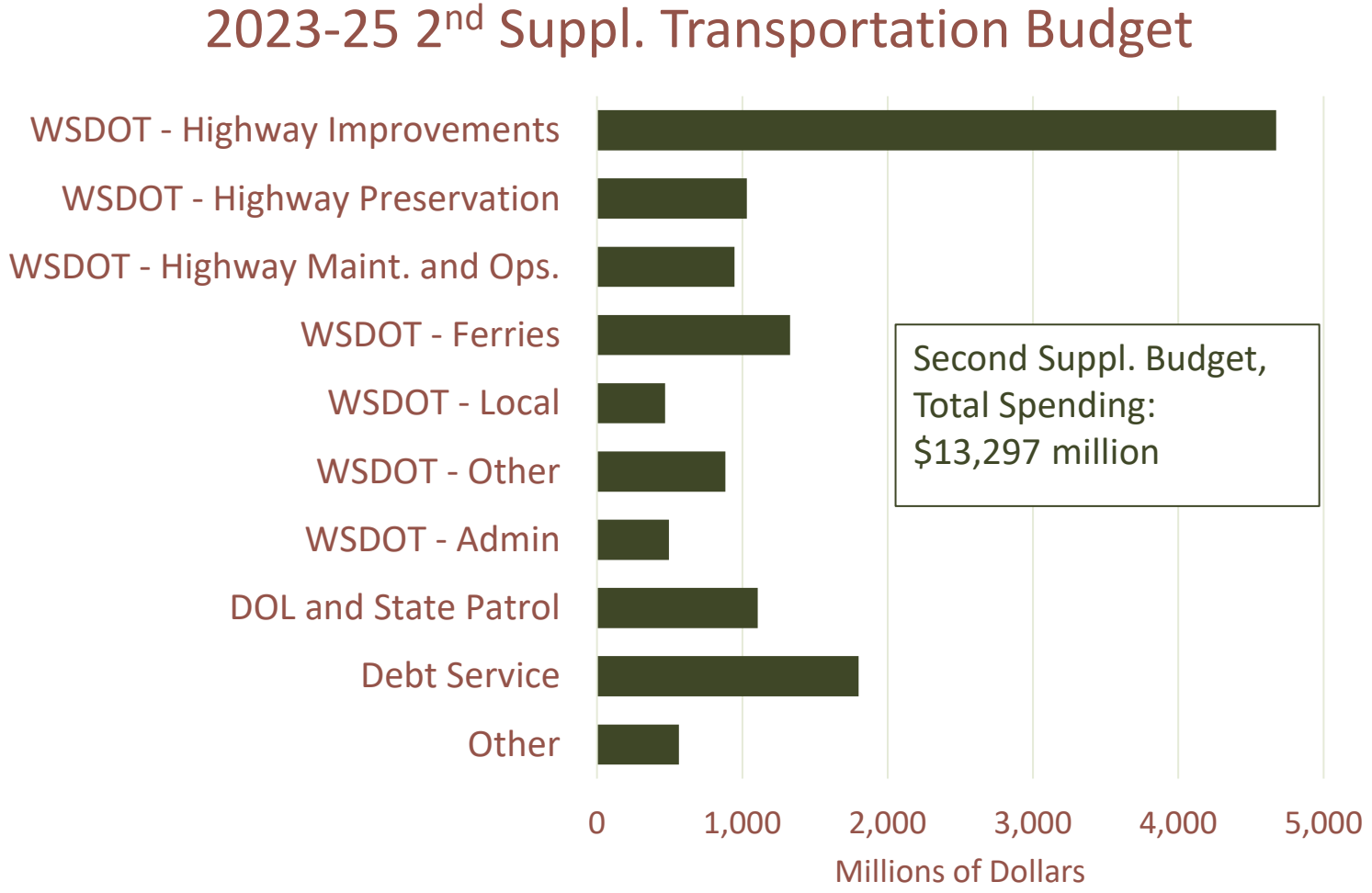
The Washington State Transportation Budget, 2023-2025

Second Supplemental Budget for the 23-25 Biennium,
As part of ESSB 5161 from the 2025 Legislative Session

Resources for the 2023-25 Transp. Biennium Budget



2023-25 Enacted 2nd Suppl. Transportation Budget: Broad Categories of Spending



Comparison to Other High-Growth States

By Means of Common Metrics

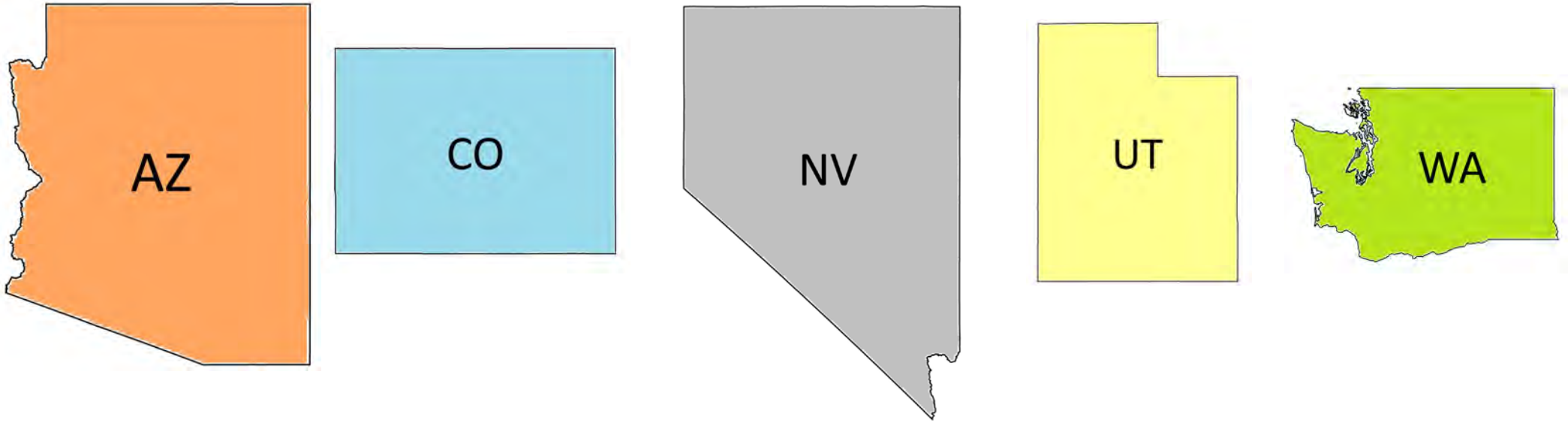
Comparison States: Which Ones?

Selecting States of Similar Size with "High Growth" in Certain Categories

- "High Growth": In the top tier of states in growth for population, jobs, and state domestic product between 2010 and 2024.

- Population Chg.[1]:
  - 1. Idaho
  - 2. Utah
  - 3. Florida
  - 4. Texas
  - 5. Nevada
  - 6. Arizona
  - 7. South Carolina
  - 8. North Dakota
  - 9. Washington
  - 10. Colorado
- Jobs Change[2]:
  - 1. Utah
  - 2. Idaho
  - 3. Nevada
  - 4. Florida
  - 5. Texas
  - 6. Arizona
  - 7. Colorado
  - 8. Washington
  - 9. South Carolina
  - 10. North Carolina
- State Domestic Prod. Chg.[3]:
  - 1. Utah
  - 2. Washington
  - 3. Texas
  - 4. North Dakota
  - 5. Colorado
  - 6. Idaho
  - 7. Florida
  - 8. Arizona
  - 9. California
  - 14. Nevada

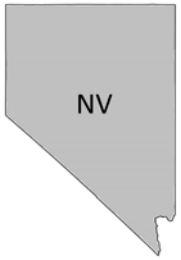
The Comparison States



Arizona Colorado Nevada Utah Washington

Comparing Metrics Across the Selected States

Comparing the States: By Geographic Area and Population (in 2024)

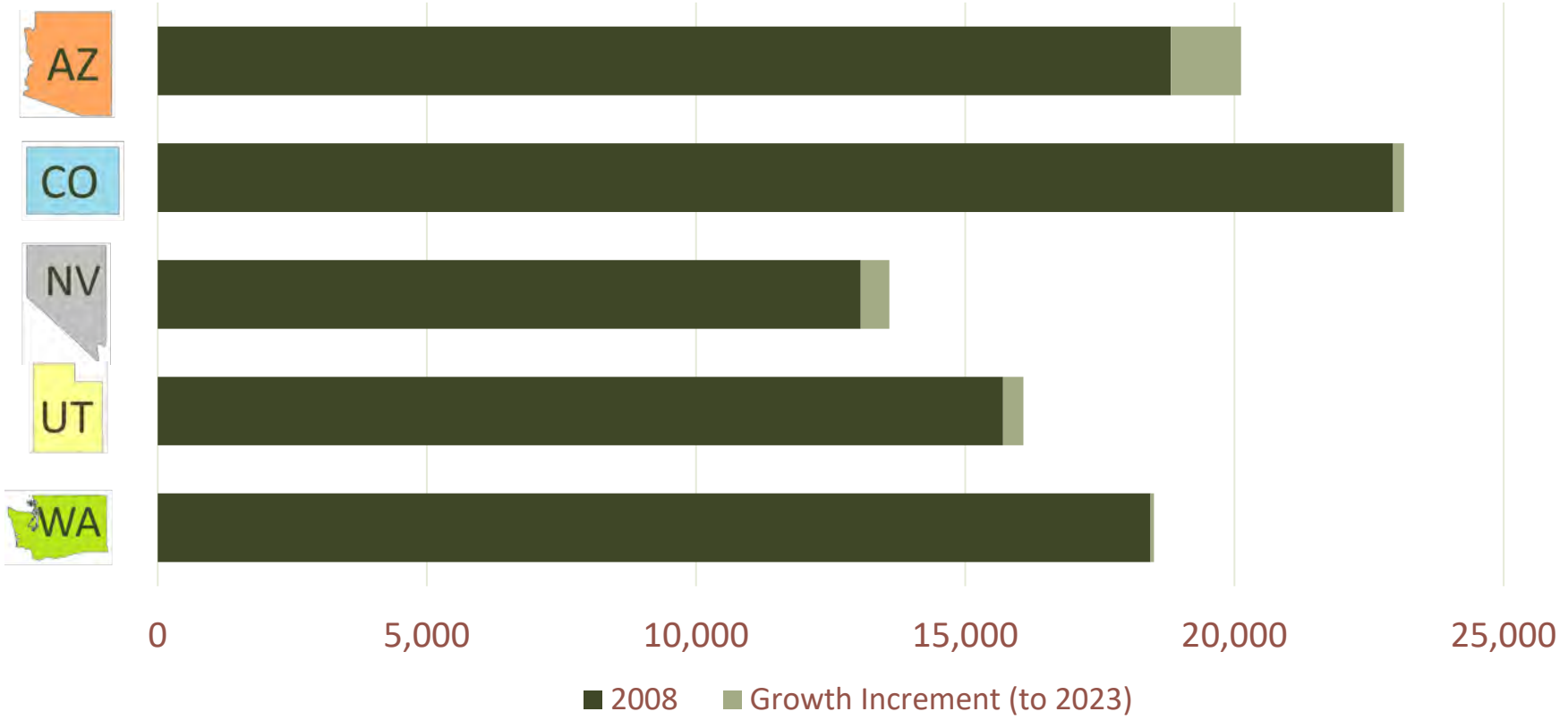


Area[4] | Population[4]

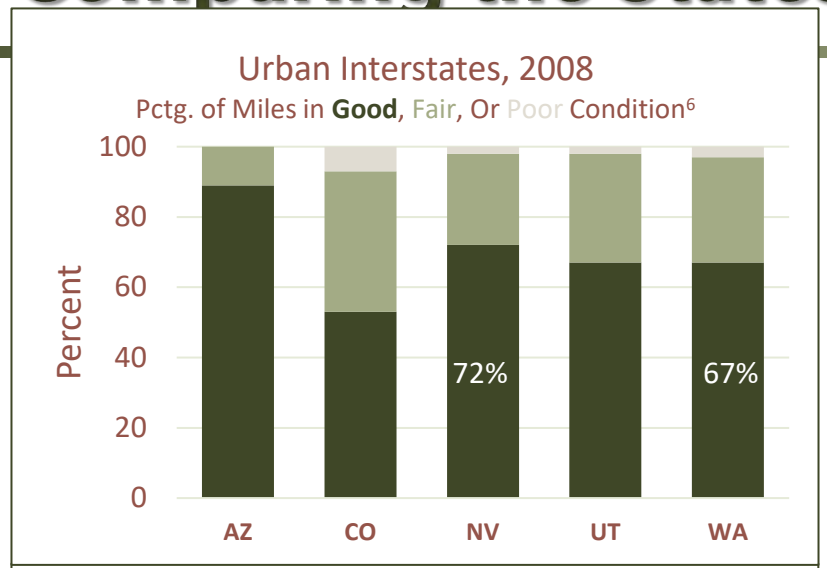
- 113,990 sq. mi. | 7,582,384 people
- 104,094 sq. mi. | 5,957,494 people
- 110,572 sq. mi. | 3,267,467 people
- 84,897 sq. mi. | 3,503,613 people
- 71,298 sq. mi. | 7,958,180 people

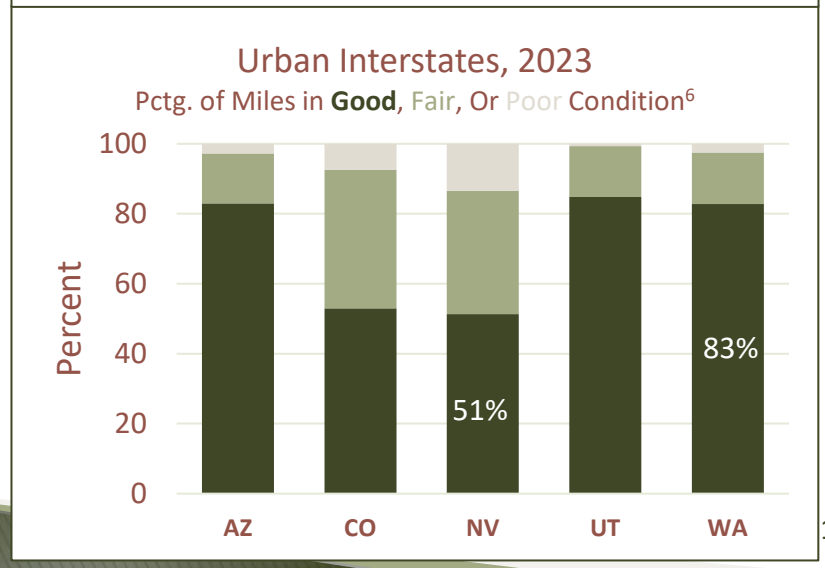
Comparing the States: By Lane Miles

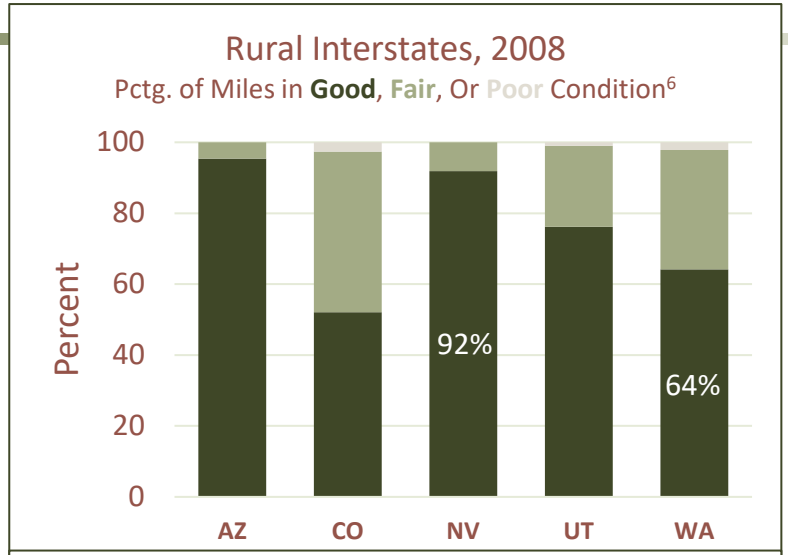
Lane Miles of Highway Owned by the State DOT: 2008 and 2023 [5]

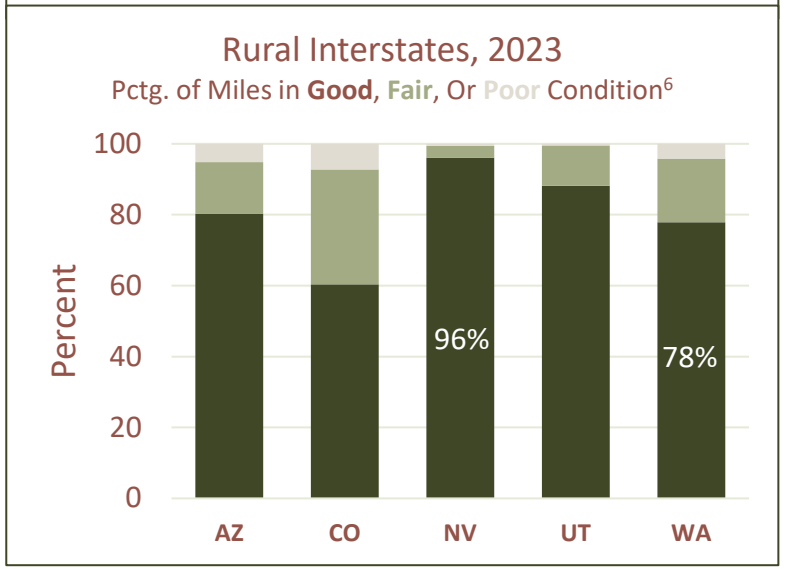


Comparing the States: By Road Condition









Comparing the States: By State Fuel Taxes and Recent State DOT Budgets

State Fuel Taxes (2025)[7]:

	Rate (per Gallon)	/	Last Increase yr
AZ	18¢	/	1990
CO	22 ¢	/	1991
NV	23.8 ¢	/	1992
UT	38.5 ¢	/	2025
WA	55.4 ¢	/	2025

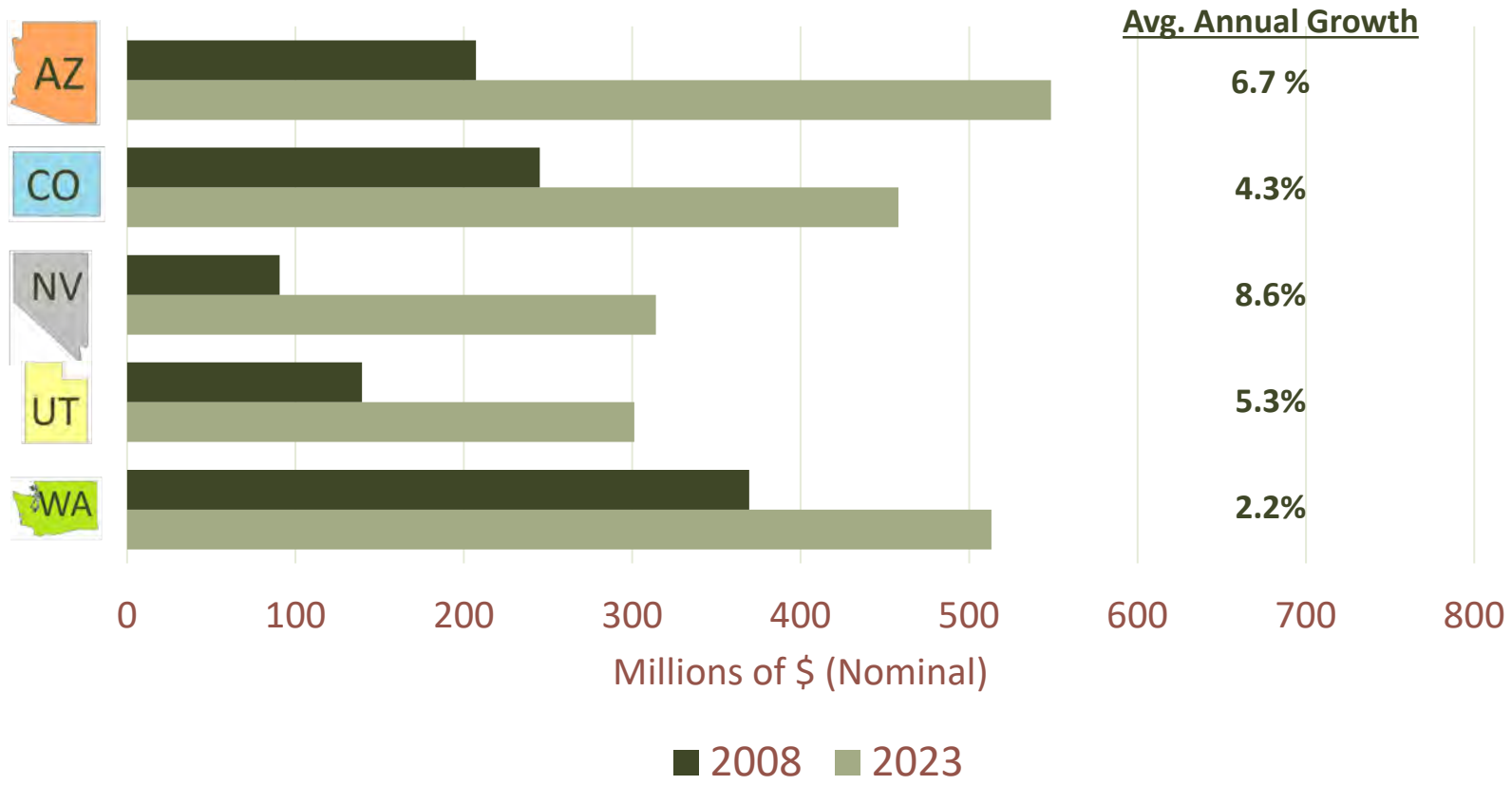
State DOT Budgets (FY 2022)[8]

	Oper.	Capital	Total
AZ	$ 564	$ 2,057	$ 2,621
CO	$ 769	$ 972	$ 1,751
NV	$ 214	$ 623	$ 837
UT	$ 714	$ 2,132	$ 2,846
WA	$ 973	$ 2,405	$ 3,377

(in $ Millions)

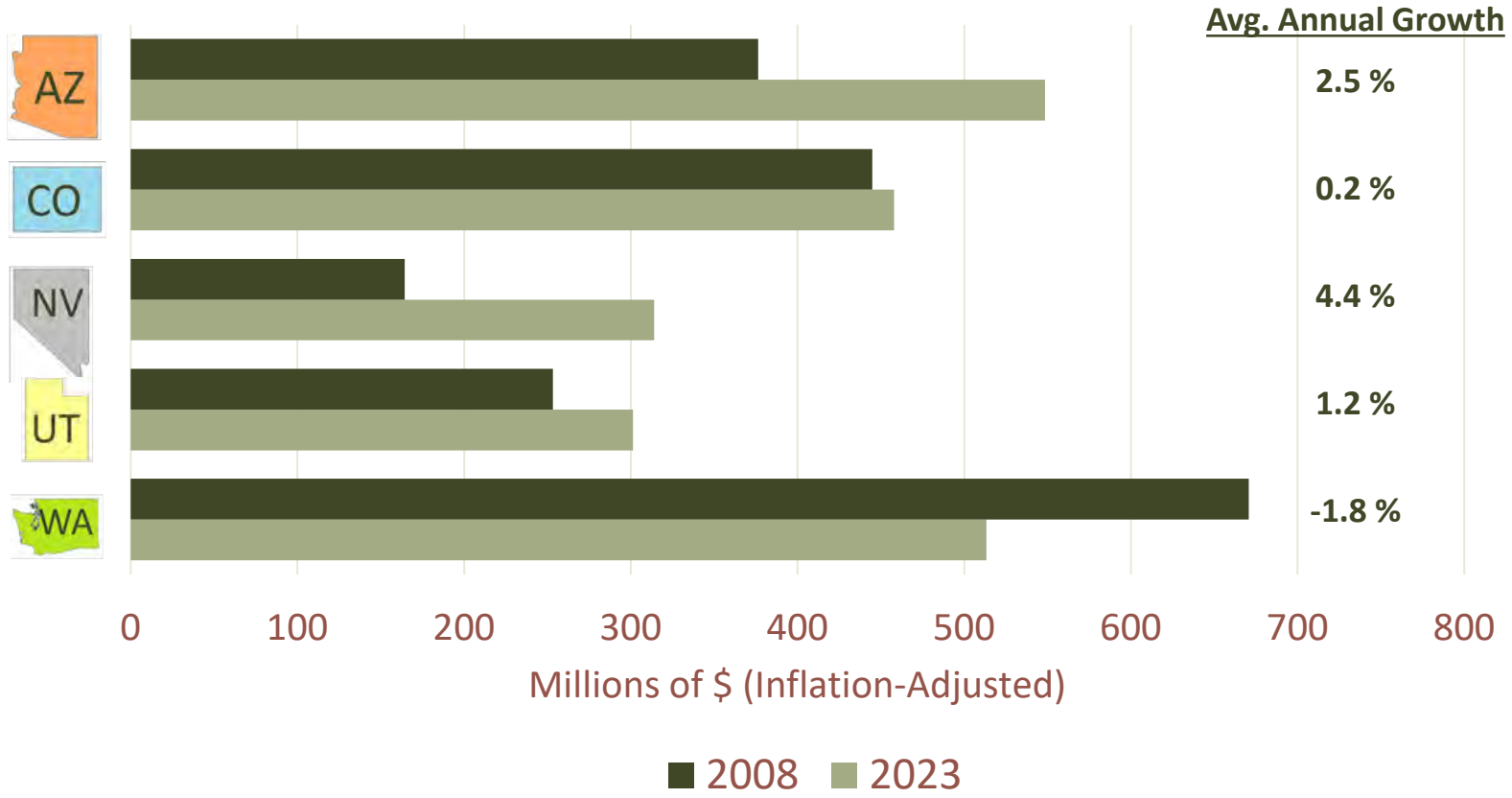
Comparing the States:
By Highway Preservation Spending (Nominal)

State DOT Capital Outlay for Highway Preservation, Millions of $ (Nominal)[9]



Comparing the States: By Highway Preservation Spending (Real)

State DOT Capital Outlay for Highway Preservation, Millions of $ (Infl.-Adjusted)[9]



Comparing the States:
By Number of Mega Projects Started Since FY 2010

Mega Projects (Since 2010)[10]	AZ	CO	NV	UT	WA
$500 M - $1,000 M	3	1	2	3	4
$1,001 M - $1,500 M	1	2		2	3
$1,501 M - $2,000 M		1			
$2,001 M - $3,000 M				1	3
$3,001 M +					2
Total:	4	4	2	6	12

Comparing the States: By DOT Governance[11]

- AZ : Director reports to the governor. A State Transportation Board within ADOT has decision-making authority and adopts the Five-Year Highway Construction Program.
- CO : Exec. Director reports to the governor. The state Transportation Commission oversees CDOT (by promulgating/adopting the agency budget and programs).
- NV : Director reports to the governor. A board of directors, chaired by the governor, administers NDOT.
- UT : Exec. Director reports to the governor. There is a separate Transportation Commission with limited decision-making authority.
- WA : Secretary reports to the governor. There is a separate Transportation Commission with limited decision-making authority.

Comparison to Other High-Growth States

Using More Subjective Measures

What Makes a State's Transportation System and/or Budgeting Unique?

Examples of "Uniqueness" in Comparison States[12]

-

: 28% of its land is tribal.
-

: 80% of its land is federally-owned.
-

: Dedication of significant general resources (26.24% of all sales and use taxes) for transportation purposes.
-

: Constitutional taxpayer bill of rights (TABOR) constrains revenue growth.
-

: Extensive ferry system with 21 vessels and 20 terminals.

What is Unique (Currently) that: Impacts a DOT's Revenues/Expenditures[12]

	AZ	CO	NV	UT	WA
Constitutional constraints on TR revenue growth		✓			
Small population-to-area ratio (limits revenues)			✓		
Emissions allowance auction/market					✓
Significant investment of general resources for transpo.				✓	
Challenging geography for operations (e.g., snow/ice removal)		✓		✓	✓
Megaprojects with challenging geotechnical parameters				✓	✓
Administers other modes as part of highways					✓
Subject to a multibillion dollar federal injunction					✓
Debt service obligations are significant					✓
Other in-state municipal districts with huge capital programs					✓

What is the Cost (or Benefit) of Being Unique?

- In Washington, the following were significant components of the state transportation budget in 2023-25:
  - State ferry system: $1,329 million (14% of WSDOT budget)
  - Fish passage barrier removal obligations: $1,049 million (11% of WSDOT budget)
  - Significant debt service obligations: $1,800 million
  - Emissions allowances: $723 million (10% of incoming state revenues)

How Have Other States Addressed Resource and Expenditure Challenges of the last 15 Years?

How Have Other States Addressed: Stagnating Fuel Tax Revenues[12]

- AZ: ½ ¢ sales tax in Maricopa County dedicated to TR (Prop. 479).
- CO: New electric vehicle registration fees; retail delivery fees; fees on passenger ride services (SB 21-260 from 2021).
- NV: Motor vehicle excise tax redirected from the general fund to transpo (SB 452 from 2023); local fuel taxes in Washoe and Clark Counties were authorized to be indexed to inflation (2009 and 2015).
- UT: 26.24% of all sales and use taxes are dedicated for transportation purposes (SB 195 in 2025). Voluntary road usage charge program created (SB 72 in 2019).

How Have Other States Addressed: Increases in Highway Construction Inflation[12]

- AZ: Exploring sponsorship opportunities for ADOT's assets.
- CO: "Project scopes for 10-Year Plan projects will be developed and adjusted to budgets where possible."
- NV: Deferring some state projects and focusing on essential operations.
- UT: The legislature provided additional one-off appropriations of sales tax funds in FY 2022-FY 2024.

Takeaways?

- To address recent highway construction inflation:
  - No silver bullet anywhere.
- To address stagnating fuel taxes:
  - Short-term fixes:
    - Increase / restructure fuel tax rates, and/or
    - Reallocate existing resources.
  - Longer-term fixes:
    - Increase toll road use
    - Impose road usage charge, and/or
    - ??? (Some other new mechanism)
- To address WA-specific issues: ?

Endnotes

1. State population estimates obtained for 2010 and 2024 from Census.gov (United States Census Bureau) web site, November 2025.
2. Growth in state gross domestic product from 2010 to 2024 obtained from the BEA.gov (Bureau of Economic Analysis) web site, Nov. 2025.
3. State nonfarm payroll figures for 2010 and 2024 obtained from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics web site (bls.gov), November 2025.
4. State area measurements obtained from Census.gov (United States Census Bureau) web site, December 2025.
5. *National Highway Statistics* series, Table hm81: State Highway Agency-Owned Public Roads – Estimated Lane-Miles and Daily Travel, for 2008 and 2023, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Obtained from fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics.cfm, December 2025.
6. *National Highway Statistics* series, Table hm64: Functional System Length – Miles by Measured Pavement Roughness (International Roughness Index), for 2008 and 2023, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Obtained from fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics.cfm, December 2025.
7. *State Motor Fuel Tax Rates – Year 2025*, obtained from the Federation of Tax Administrators' web site (taxadmin.org), December 2025.
8. States' Department of Transportation budgets for FY 2022 and 2023 obtained from *Transportation Governance and Finance: A 50-State Review of State Legislatures and Departments of Transportation*, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, published 2023. FY 2022 budget estimates for Washington State obtained by using the budget allotment splits shown in AFRS, separately for WSDOT operating and for WSDOT capital.
9. *National Highway Statistics* series, Table sf12a: State Highway Agency Capital Outlay – Classified by Improvement Types, for 2008 and 2023, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Obtained from fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics.cfm, December 2025. "Preservation" is defined to include the following columns from the table: 3R / (Minor Widening, Restoration & Rehabilitation, Resurfacing); Bridge Work / Minor Bridge Rehab.; Safety; Traffic Oper. & Control Systems; and Environ. Enhancement & Other.
10. List of mega projects, defined as projects with a total cost of $500 million or more, obtained for the period of 2010-2025 from staff at each of the states' departments of transportation, via email. Washington state data was obtained via the legislative budget systems.
11. *Ibid.* (see no. 8 above.)
12. Subjective information on unique aspects of state transportation budgets and systems; on ways in which states are addressing stagnating fuel taxes; and on ways in which states are addressing highway construction inflation was obtained in email conversations with legislative staff and DOT staff in Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah, in December 2025 and January 2026.