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TRIP Report Documents Infrastructure Needs in Louisiana

Louisiana needs a major increase in funding to improve its surface transportation infrastructure, the nonprofit transportation research organization TRIP concluded in a report released Wednesday.

"As the state looks to rebound from the current economic downturn, Louisiana will need to enhance its surface transportation system by improving the physical condition of its surface transportation network and enhancing the system's ability to provide efficient and reliable mobility for residents, visitors, and businesses," the report states.

More than 40 percent of Louisiana's major roads were rated in poor or mediocre condition as of 2007, the "Future Mobility in Louisiana: Meeting the State's Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility" report notes. Overall, roads in need of repair cost each Louisiana motorist about \$388 per year in extra vehicle maintenance costs -- about \$1.2 billion total.

In addition, the report focuses on safety. Louisiana has the second highest traffic fatality rate in the United States. The rate was 2.02 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel in 2008, 62 percent higher than the national average of 1.25. Between 2004 and 2008, a total of 4,782 people lost their lives in motor-vehicle crashes in Louisiana.

Traffic congestion in Louisiana is also a huge challenge, according to TRIP. The report contends congestion will only continue to worsen without additional capacity to accommodate future population and economic growth. When combined with deteriorated pavement conditions, these safety and capacity challenges cost Louisiana motorists a total of \$3.1 billion annually, TRIP estimates.

The report also highlights Louisiana's challenges involving bridges. Thirteen percent of the state's bridges were rated structurally deficient in 2008, while another 16 percent were classified that year as functionally obsolete.

Several key transportation projects that can't move forward without a significant increase in funding are documented by TRIP. These projects include rehabilitating the Port Allen Canal Bridge, adding lanes to about 8 miles of Interstate 10 in East Baton Rouge and Ascension parishes, and starting passenger train service between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 has provided Louisiana with about \$430 million in extra federal funding for highways and bridges plus \$66 million for mass transit. While that money has been helpful, the state still faces a \$12.5 billion funding shortfall, the report notes.

"It is critical that Louisiana's transportation system is adequately funded at the state and federal level," said Will Wilkins, TRIP executive director. "Thousands of jobs and the state's economy are riding on it."

The 49-page report is available at tinyurl.com/TRIP-Louisiana.