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TRIP Report Examines the Economic Benefits of Key Projects in Michigan

Michigan's economic turnaround depends on completing 50 proposed surface transportation projects, according to a report issued Monday by the nonprofit transportation research organization TRIP.

The report, "Top 50 Surface Transportation Projects to Stimulate Michigan's Economic Recovery," focuses on key infrastructure needs in the state involving everything from highways and bridges to freight trains and rapid-transit systems. These projects are spread across the Great Lakes State in 21 counties. TRIP based its list of high-priority projects on such criteria as their potential for job creation, safety improvements, enhanced access and mobility, and long-range economic competitiveness.

"The TRIP report demonstrates why it's so important that we find the needed money for transportation," said Bill Shreck, communications director for the Michigan Department of Transportation. "Transportation is important to economic development and job growth."

A top priority for the state involves the construction of the Detroit River International Crossing. That proposed six-lane bridge would connect Interstate 75 in Detroit to Canada 401 in Windsor, Ontario. A new border crossing would create 10,000 construction jobs and help preserve or attract up to 25,000 jobs in Michigan and 97,000 jobs nationwide, according to the report.

The next project on the report's priority list is widening Interstate 94 between Interstate 96 and Conner Avenue in downtown Detroit. This project is estimated to create 15,200 jobs during the multiyear construction phases and, according to the report, it would also reduce congestion along that corridor and enhance the region's economic competitiveness.

Other projects listed in the report include adding two High Occupancy Vehicle lanes on 18 miles of Interstate 75 from Eight Mile Road to Michigan 59 in Oakland County; building the Woodward Avenue light-rail line in the Detroit area; and designing and constructing a new deck system on 1.4 miles of the suspended section of the Mackinac Bridge to improve safety standards and provide a long-lasting road surface.

Significant portions of Michigan's surface transportation system are presently beset by major congestion and other challenges. In 2008, for example, 39% of the state's urban highways were rated as congested. More than a third of the state's major roads were rated as deficient that same year. In addition, 14% of Michigan's bridges were rated structurally deficient and another 12% deemed functionally obsolete as of 2008.

"The physical condition of Michigan's transportation system will play a significant role in determining how successfully the state's economy will perform in future years," said Frank Moretti, TRIP's director of policy and research. "Investments in transportation today would represent a critically important down payment for a stronger Michigan economy in the years to come."

The 23-page report is available at tinyurl.com/TRIP-Report-Michigan.

Questions regarding this article may be directed to editor@ashtojournal.org.