

Alabama Transportation Projects to Hit Roadblock Without Funding Boost

Without a substantial boost in state or federal highway funding, Alabama will be unable to complete numerous projects to improve the condition and expand the capacity of roads, bridges, highways and public transit, hampering the state's ability to improve mobility, safety and to enhance economic development opportunities. This is according to a new report released last week by TRIP, a Washington, D.C. based national transportation research organization.

According to the TRIP report, "Future Mobility in Alabama: Meeting the State's Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility," 47 percent of major roads in the Montgomery area are in poor or mediocre condition, while 16 percent of major roads throughout the state are rated poor or mediocre. Driving on deteriorated roads costs the average Montgomery motorist \$366 each year in extra vehicle operating costs including accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs and increased fuel consumption and tire wear. The TRIP report includes a list of needed pavement preservation and reconstruction projects throughout the state that can not proceed without a significant boost in federal or state funding. These projects include adding lanes to sections of I-65 in Montgomery County and I-59 in Jefferson County, improvements to the I-10 interchange in Baldwin County and pavement rehabilitation on several sections of I-20 in Calhoun and Cleburne Counties.

In addition to deteriorated road conditions, 11 percent of Alabama's bridges are structurally deficient, showing significant deterioration of the bridge deck, supports, or other major components. An additional 13 percent of Alabama bridges are

functionally obsolete, meaning they no longer meet modern highway design standards, often because of narrow lanes, inadequate clearances or poor alignment. Needed bridge repair or replacement projects that can not proceed without additional state or federal transportation funding include the following: the addition of lanes and new bridges on I-85 in Lee County, bridge and pavement repairs on I-20 at Snow Creek and SR-21 in Calhoun County, replacing the SR-16 bridge over the Tensaw-Spanish River in Mobile, and widening the I-65 bridge over the Pintlala Creek relief in Montgomery. The TRIP report contains a full list of needed roadway projects that lack sufficient funds.

Alabama's vehicle travel and population have increased without a corresponding increase in lane miles, leading to 52 percent of the state's urban highways being congested during peak times. Traffic congestion in Alabama's urban areas is likely to worsen significantly unless the state is able to improve its transportation system. According to the TRIP report, Birmingham drivers lose 32 hours a year in traffic. Needed roadway widening projects that can not proceed without additional funding include the SR-900 Memphis to Atlanta Corridor, the Birmingham Northern Beltline, adding lanes to sections of I-65 in Shelby, Montgomery and Cullman Counties, and adding lanes to I-85 in Lee County. A full list of needed capacity enhancing projects is included in the report.

Despite a drop in traffic fatalities in recent years, an average of 1,117 people lost their lives each year from 2004 to 2008 on Alabama's roads. The state's traffic fatality rate of 1.63 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles

of travel in 2008 is 30 percent higher than the national average of 1.25. The traffic fatality rate on Alabama's non-Interstate rural roads was more than double the rate on all other roads in the state.

The federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided approximately \$567 million in stimulus funding for highway, bridge and transit improvements in Alabama. This funding has created jobs and served as an important down payment on needed transportation improvements but is not sufficient to allow the state to proceed with numerous projects needed to modernize its surface transportation system. The current long-term federal surface transportation legislation, which expires on Dec. 31, 2010, remains a critical source of funding for road and bridge repairs and transit improvements in Alabama.

"Unless Alabama is able to secure additional transportation revenue, many needed projects will remain stranded on the drawing board because of insufficient funding," said Will Wilkins, executive director of TRIP. "It is critical that Alabama's transportation system be adequately funded at the state, federal and local level. In addition to providing better road and bridge conditions, easing congestion and enhancing safety, improving the transportation system creates jobs and spurs needed economic growth."

The report is available at <http://www.tripnet.org>.

Article Date: 03-29-2010
Source: TRIP