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## Report: The Top 25 Surface Transportation Projects to Support Economic Growth in Wyoming

In order to support Wyoming's rapidly growing energy industry and allow the state's agriculture, tourism, and manufacturing industries to thrive, the state will need to make numerous improvements to its surface transportation system. This is according to a new report released Jan. 5 by **TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based national transportation research organization.**

TRIP's report, "**The Top 25 Surface Transportation Projects to Support Economic Growth in Wyoming,**" identifies and ranks the projects needed to provide Wyoming with a transportation system that can support the increased movement of people, goods, and natural resources throughout the state.

These improvements would enhance **economic development opportunities** in the state's burgeoning energy sector as well as in other critical areas of the state's economy including tourism, agriculture, and manufacturing, according to TRIP. They would also improve safety on the state's roads, which would lower the financial and economic costs of traffic crashes, the organization says.

According to the TRIP report, the most needed project is the modernization of the entire length of Interstate 80 within the state to include the construction of variable speed lanes, truck climbing lanes, truck parking areas, and chain-up areas to facilitate freight and passenger travel on this critical, national east-west corridor.

The following projects are also among the most needed in the state: widening Route 59 in Campbell County to four lanes to improve access to the Powder River Basin area, reconstruction and redesign of the I-80/I-25 interchange in Cheyenne to better serve nearby distribution centers and other businesses, construction of a West Beltway Loop Highway in Casper to improve freight movement and development along the corridor, and constructing a connector route in Torrington to replace the US 85/US 20-26 intersection and provide access to the Powder River Basin sulfur coal area and Niobrara Oil Play.

Additional projects in the top 10 include modernizing 100 miles of county roads in Campbell County to serve the Powder River Basin coal mines, widening U.S. Route 20/26 to four lanes from Casper to Shosoni to address the lack of connectivity in central Wyoming, widening the existing Wind River Canyon tunnels to improve commercial access to the region, constructing a 3-mile connector route from I-80 in Laramie County to WY 213 past Burns to replace the existing roadway/rail crossing and provide improved access to the Niobrara Oil Play, and the construction of a 16-mile Western Beltway Loop in Sheridan to relieve truck travel on I-80 and improve access in the western part of the region. A full list of needed projects, descriptions, and their impact on economic development can be found in the appendix of the report.

"A well built and maintained modern transportation system is critical to the future of Wyoming's economic growth," said **Laurie Farkas, vice president of**

**the Greater Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce,** in a written press statement. "The bottom line for our state is we must be able to move supplies and materials in and out of Wyoming. Some people see construction and maintenance of our roads as a cost when it should be looked at as long-term investment in the future of our state."

Enhancing critical segments of **Wyoming's surface transportation system** will boost the state's economy in the short-term by creating jobs in construction and related fields. In the long term, these improvements will enhance economic competitiveness by reducing travel delays and transportation costs, improving access and mobility, improving safety and stimulating sustained job growth, and improving the quality of life for the state's residents and visitors.

Sustaining Wyoming's long-term economic growth and maintaining the state's high quality of life will require increased investment in expanding the capacity of the state's surface transportation system, which will enhance business productivity and support short- and long-term job creation in the state.

"Wyoming can't get where it wants to go — in both a literal and an economic sense — without an efficient transportation system," said **Will Wilkins, executive director of TRIP.** "It is critical that Wyoming's transportation system is adequately funded at the local, state, and federal level. Thousands of jobs and the state's economic well being are riding on it."