

# Road**Works**

## The Nation's Top Five Transportation Headaches



**A** report recently released jointly by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and TRIP (formerly The Road Information Program), identifies America's top five transportation headaches and offers five remedies for relief. The organizations say in the report that addressing the nation's transportation headaches will not only improve America's transportation system, but will also provide a significant short- and long-term boost to the nation's economic recovery.

The following are the top five "transportation headaches" pointed out in the report:

- 1. Aging Bridges, Crumbling Pavements and Deteriorating Transit.** Approximately one in four of the nation's bridges are either in need of significant repair or are too narrow to handle today's traffic, according to AASHTO. (For more on the state of the nation's bridges, see *Better Roads'* exclusive "2008 Bridge Inventory," November 2008.) As the bulk of the nation's bridges approach 50 years in service, many will require costly reconstruction or replacement to remain open. "Deteriorated and aging pavements provide American drivers with a rough ride, contributing to increased vehicle maintenance costs, particularly for urban motorists, as urban pavement deficiency rates are significantly higher than in non-urban areas," according to AASHTO.
- 2. Congested Roads, Highways and Transit Systems.** Increasing traffic congestion is costing the nation's freight transportation network nearly \$8 billion per year, reducing the productivity of the U.S. economy. Trucking is the backbone of the nation's freight transportation system, and higher transportation costs mean higher prices for consumers. "The nation's freight system (all modes) transported approximately 15 billion in goods in 2005, nearly 80 percent of which moved by trucks on the roads," according to the report.
- 3. Traffic fatalities and injuries.** More than 41,000 lives were lost on the nation's roads in 2007. Although this is the lowest number of traffic fatalities in nearly 50 years, it is still unacceptable and can be further lowered by making needed roadway safety improvements, according to the report.
- 4. Demand is stressing the system.** Increasing demands on the transportation system, largely due to rising levels of population, travel and economic activity result in additional wear and tear on the our nation's roads, bridges and public transit systems. "Since 1990, U.S. population and vehicle travel increased by 41 percent, while transit travel has increased by the same level since 1995," according to the report.
- 5. Everyone's costs are rising.** Drivers are losing \$249 billion each year as a result of travel on roads that are congested, deficient or lack desirable safety features, the report notes. The costs of materials used for road, highway and bridge construction have increased by 55 percent during the last five years, according to the report, further stretching the already thin and underfunded transportation budgets at the federal, state and local level. The current level of national transportation investment would need to double in order to significantly improve the country's highway, transit, passenger rail and freight systems, the report points out.

For the full report, including the top five remedies for these headaches, go to [www.tripnet.org](http://www.tripnet.org).