by John Latta and Tina Grady Barbaccia

RoadWorks

The latest highway and bridge industry news and announcements

Rough Roads Cost Drivers Big Bucks

Driving on rough roads costs the average American motorist approximately $400 a year in extra vehicle operating costs. Drivers living in urban areas with populations over 250,000 are paying upwards of $750 more annually because of accelerated vehicle deterioration, increased maintenance, additional fuel consumption, and tire wear caused by poor road conditions.

Rough Roads Ahead: Fix Them Now or Pay for It Later, a report recently released by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and TRIP, reports that one-third of the nation's major highways, including Interstates, freeways, and major roads, are in poor or mediocre condition. Roads in urban areas, which carry 66 percent of the traffic, are in much worse shape.

"The American people are paying for rough roads multiple times," said Kirk T. Steudle, director of the Michigan Department of Transportation, at a news conference held to release the report. "Rough roads lead to diminished safety, higher vehicle operating costs, and more expensive road repairs. It costs $1 to keep a road in good shape for every $7 you would have to spend on reconstruction. It's another drag on the economy."

The report uses the latest government statistics to show pavement conditions in all 50 states and vehicle operating costs by state and urban areas. The report also finds that:

- 30 to 60 percent of the roads in 20 of the nation's largest urban areas are in poor condition.
- 36 percent of the roads in the Detroit urban area are in poor condition. In contrast, the Los Angeles area and surrounding communities have 64 percent of their roads in poor condition.
- 61 percent of rural roads are in good condition.
- 72 percent of the interstate highway system is in good condition, but age, weather conditions, and burgeoning traffic are eroding ride quality.

"Our nation has invested $1.75 trillion in our public highway system over the past 50 years," said John Horsley, AASHTO Executive Director. "We hope Congress will make it possible for the federal government to sustain its share of the increased investment needed to keep America's roads in good condition. If not, it will cost the American people billions more later."

The report points out that traffic growth has far outpaced highway construction, particularly in major metropolitan areas. The number of miles driven in this country jumped more than 41 percent from 1990 to 2007 – from 2.1 trillion miles in 1990 to 3 trillion in 2007. In some parts of the country, dramatic population growth has occurred without a corresponding increase in road capacity, placing enormous pressure on roads that, in many cases, were built 50 years ago.

"The federal stimulus program is providing a helpful down payment towards repairing some of the nation's rough roads," said Frank Moretti, TRIP's Director of Policy and Research. "But it will take a significant long-term boost in investment by all levels of government to provide Americans with a smooth ride."

The full report is available at *http://roughroads.transportation.org*, along with charts, photographs and examples. ❖

Deere: Feds should help non-road OEMs

John Deere Construction & Forestry Senior Vice President of Sales & Marketing Domenic Ruccolo recently testified before the U.S. House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming during the "Constructing a Green Transportation Policy: Transit Modes and Infrastructure" hearing.

Ruccolo's testimony advocated making infrastructure projects greener through the use of more productive and efficient construction equipment.

He also urged the federal government to take steps to support further efforts within the construction equipment industry to improve equipment productivity and efficiency and reduce environmental impacts.

"Collaboration and cooperation between the public and private sectors are needed to investigate and fund the research and development of new standards and technologies to further improve equipment productivity and efficiency," Ruccolo said. "The federal government has not consistently assisted the non-road equipment industry in the past on such an effort, concentrating instead upon the on-road sector."

Ruccolo testified that by the government's recognition of "the role non-road equipment will play in transforming the transportation and other sectors of the economy to achieve ambitious and necessary greenhouse gas reductions, we can see that appropriate investment by the federal government into non-road technologies would create substantial environment returns.

He also pointed out that any future strategic modal shifts from road transport to rail and public transportation systems to help offset growth in greenhouse gas emissions would require construction equipment to build and maintain the infrastructure foundation for the shifts.

"By supporting the non-road equipment industry to make machines more productive and efficient, the nation will be able to achieve these shifts and realize the environmental benefits more quickly and with lest cost," Ruccolo testified.