



TRIP report finds Montana's highways, bridges 'increasingly deteriorated and crowded'

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A new report finds that Montana's highways and bridges are in poor and mediocre condition, with the state's traffic fatality rate among the worst in the nation.

Transportation research group [TRIP](#) on Wednesday released a report on Montana's highway infrastructure, noting that the state's roads and bridges have "increasingly deteriorated and crowded" and that the state has the third highest traffic fatality rate in the U.S.

If the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) depletes ([which it is expected to do by September](#)), the state will see fewer projects that would improve its infrastructure.

The report, "[Montana Transportation by the Numbers: Meeting the State's Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility](#)," nearly half of Montana's major urban, locally and state maintained roads are in poor or mediocre condition, while nearly one in five of the state's bridges are [structurally deficient or functionally obsolete](#).

Here are some of the exact figures TRIP reports on Montana's major urban roads:

- 28 percent have pavements in poor condition
- 18 percent have pavements in mediocre condition
- \$484: annual extra vehicle operating cost for the average urban motorist
- \$170 million: statewide annual extra vehicle operating cost

TRIP notes that the poor and mediocre conditions have resulted from "a lack of adequate funding."

The report finds that 8 percent of the state's bridges are structurally deficient, which means that at least one major component shows



significant deterioration. According to the report, many of these structurally deficient bridges have weight restrictions and restrict or redirect heavy traffic.

The TRIP report also finds that an additional 10 percent of Montana's bridges are functionally obsolete, meaning they fail to meet current design standards. These bridges are safe and regularly monitored; they are often deemed functionally obsolete because of narrow lanes, low clearances and other minor design inadequacies.

The report notes that in 2012, Montana had one of the highest traffic fatality rates in the nation: 1.72 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel.

According to the report, 1,053 deadly crashes occurred between 2008 and 2012 — an average of 211 deaths per year.

Additionally, the state's non-Interstate rural roads had a traffic fatality rate of 2.25 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled, which is nearly twice the 1.26 traffic fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel on all other roads in Montana.

According to the report, increased investment in transportation infrastructure and adequate funding could improve conditions on Montana highways and bridges. Currently, the state receives \$3 for every dollar it contributes to the Highway Trust Fund (HTF).

However, due to a lack of funds in the HTF, the [federal government may start delaying payments](#) to states as early as this summer. Those delays would result in fewer completed highway and bridge projects in Montana.