

Report reveals Minnesota's road woes

TRIP study puts state's funding gap at \$50 billion

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Minnesota's roads and bridges have significant deterioration, traffic congestion is likely to increase and the state's rural roads have a high-rate of fatal traffic crashes. In the past decade, the state has used a combination of federal and state funding to improve its surface transportation network, but many sorely needed transportation projects still remain unfunded, according to a new report released by TRIP, a Washington, D.C.,-based national transportation organization.

The report, "Future Mobility in Minnesota: Meeting the State's Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility," finds that 76% of the state's major urban roadways are considered congested during peak travel times—the highest share in the nation—and 32% of major roads in the state are in either poor or mediocre condition. In addition to deteriorating road conditions, 9% of the state's bridges (20 ft or longer) are structurally deficient and another 3% are functionally obsolete. The report also found that Minnesota's rural traffic fatality rate of 1.27 fatalities per 100 million miles of travel is nearly two-and-a-half times higher than the fatality rate on all other roads in the state.

Because of these deficiencies, the average Twin Cities motorist loses \$1,501 each year in the form of extra vehicle operating costs due to poor road conditions, lost time and fuel caused by traffic congestion, and the cost of traffic crashes. Minnesota roadways that lack desirable safety features have inadequate capacity to meet travel demands or have poor pavement conditions cost the state's drivers a total of \$3.1 billion each year.

"Congestion and accident costs are a shameful waste of our resources" said Joseph Strauss, executive vice president of the North Metro Mayors Association. "Our families and businesses would be much better served if additional state and federal funds were invested to correct the problems that are so obvious."

According to the TRIP report, \$65 billion in transportation funding will be needed over the next 20 years to achieve state priorities for safety, mobility and infrastructure preservation. However, the Minnesota Department of Transportation estimates that only \$15 billion will be available during that time, leaving a transportation funding gap of \$50 billion. Unless the state is able to close the funding shortfall, many needed projects will be unable to proceed. The TRIP report contains lists of needed roadway repair and capacity expansion projects in the Twin Cities area and statewide that cannot move forward without additional transportation funding.

The federal surface transportation program remains a critical source of funding for road and bridge repairs and transit improvements in Minnesota. According to the report, from 1998 to 2008, Minnesota received \$5.8 billion in federal funding for road, highway and bridge improvements, and \$1.5 billion for public transit, a total of \$7.3 billion. Federal funds provide 26% of revenues used annually by the Minnesota Department of Transportation to pay for road, highway and bridge construction, repairs and maintenance and 17% of the revenue used annually to pay for the operation of and capital improvements to the state's public transit systems.

This year's federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provides approximately \$502 million in stimulus funding for highway and bridge improvements and \$94 million for public-transit improvements in Minnesota. This funding, however, serves only as a down payment on needed road, highway, bridge and transit improvements and is not sufficient to allow the state to proceed with numerous projects needed to modernize its surface transportation system.