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These Places Have the Nation's Worst Roads

Bumps and potholes are par for the course on more than two-thirds of America's roads



On a majority of American roads, potholes and bumps are the norm. ([Joshua Davis](#) - Flickr/Creative Commons)

By [Erin Blakemore](#) | smithsonian.com

Have you hit a pothole or driven over a hair-raising bump in your car lately? If so, you could be a victim of aging infrastructure, and it could be costing you big bucks. [As John Metcalfe reports for CityLab](#), a new report shows just how bad some of America's roads are to drive on—and just how much unmaintained roads cost motorists.

[A new report](#) from [TRIP](#), a national transportation research nonprofit, analyzed the condition of major urban roads in the United States using data from the [Federal Highway Administration](#). Every year the FHWA asks state transportation officials to rate the smoothness of local roads. This year, a third of all major urban roads are rated “substandard” or “poor,” while another 39 percent are only “mediocre” or “fair.” Only 28 percent of the nation's major roads were in “good” condition—and the number fell to 20 percent when major rural roads were factored in.

That's a big problem, especially given that, according to the report, vehicle travel has increased 15 percent in the last 15 years. The report points out that large commercial trucks—the vehicles that do the most damage to paved roads—are increasing their travel at a rate twice that of passenger vehicles and other cars. And the report claims that short-term repairs are not enough, pushing for preventative maintenance instead. That's all very well for the state and local officials looking for ways to spend their slender funds. But it turns out that individual drivers pay a price, too. Every bump and jiggle puts stress on a car, raises fuel consumption and contributes to its eventual demise, and for the cities most affected by deteriorating roads the cost to car owners is high.

The San Francisco/Oakland area scored worst in the report, with 71 percent poor roads and an average annual additional vehicle operating cost of \$978. The Los Angeles metro area scored second, with 60 percent poor roads, followed by San Jose, Detroit and Milwaukee. The average additional cost to motorists was actually higher for Oklahoma City (eighth on the list) at \$1,025 and Tulsa (tenth on the list) at \$998 than the first-ranking metro area.

Prioritizing repairs can be a big burden on cities, as in second-worst Los Angeles, [which according to KPCC's Sharon McNary](#) has earmarked the majority of its road repair funds to fixing the city's least damaged streets in an “80/20” policy. The city [has also been testing out a new substance](#)—a kind of rubber-like asphalt that is claimed to extend the life of heavily-damaged streets by up to a decade. Perhaps one day a combination of upped funding, better prioritization and advancing technology will make streets in America's bumpiest cities smoother. Until then, buckle up and make sure to pad your pocketbook.