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National group confirms state has poor roads

FRONT PAGE

BY BOBBY HARRISON

Daily Journal Jackson Bureau

JACKSON – A report released Thursday by a national transportation research group re-enforces what many state officials have been saying – Mississippi has a lot of roads and bridges in poor condition.

TRIP, a Washington, D.C.,-based group funded at least partly by companies in the road and bridge construction and maintenance business, released the report during a news conference at the state Capitol.

The TRIP report concluded "if Mississippi is unable to complete needed transportation projects, it will hamper the state's ability to...enhance economic development opportunities and quality of life."

According to the report, more than half of the state's "major locally and state maintained roads" are in poor (28 percent) or mediocre condition (27 percent.) The report said the information was gleaned from Federal Highway Administration data gathered annually by the Mississippi Department of Transportation.

In terms of bridges, 12 percent statewide were listed as deficient – the 12th highest share in the nation.

The report re-enforces findings of the Mississippi Economic Council.

In a report released at the end of 2015, MEC found that 936 state bridges and more than 24,500 miles of state highways are in disrepair, and on the local level, 2,989 bridges and nearly 13,300 roads are in need of repair.

It would take \$6.6 billion to fund all of the transportation needs, the MEC study found.

MEC proposed spending an additional \$375 million annually on the state's infrastructure needs. While most of the state's elected leaders have acknowledged the infrastructure problems facing Mississippi, they have been unable to agree on a funding source to address those needs.

Those infrastructure problems cost Mississippi drivers an estimated \$1.4 billion annually in vehicle repair and operating costs.



In addition, Mississippi has the third highest traffic fatality rate in the nation at 1.70 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles, compared to the national average of 1.13. Those statistics, gathered in 2015, also could be attributed partly to the poor road conditions.

Officials say the state's 18.4-cent tax on a gallon of gasoline, which is the primary source of state funds for the Department of Transportation, is not a growing source of revenue. While there are more cars on the road consuming motor fuel, they are much more energy efficient than in the 1980s when the tax was enacted, thus the revenue source is not growing.

During the same period, there have been significant increases in the cost of building highways – as much as 400 percent for some of the needed components, according to officials with the state Department of Transportation.

bobby.harrison@journalinc.com Twitter: @bobbyharrison9