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OKC, Tulsa roads among most deteriorated in U.S.

Washington, DC – Approximately half of major roads in the Oklahoma City and Tulsa urban areas are in poor condition, costing drivers roughly $1,000 annually in additional vehicle operating costs (VOC). Fifty-three percent of major roads in Oklahoma City and 49 percent of Tulsa's major urban roads are in poor condition. Driving on rough roads costs the average Oklahoma City driver $1,025 annually, while the average Tulsa driver loses $998 each year. The Oklahoma City urban area ranks eighth in the nation among large urban areas (500,000+ population) in the share of roads in poor condition, while Tulsa ranks tenth. Oklahoma City ranks first in the annual cost to motorists of driving on rough roads, followed by Tulsa in second. Driving on roads in disrepair increases consumer costs by accelerating vehicle deterioration and depreciation, and increasing needed maintenance, fuel consumption and tire wear.

In 2014 nearly one-third (32 percent) of the nation's major urban roads– Interstates, freeways and other arterial routes – had pavements that were in substandard condition and provided an unacceptably rough ride to motorists, costing the average driver $523 annually. The nationwide annual cost of driving on deteriorated roads totals $112 billion.

"Oklahoma is really behind the eight ball when it comes to road maintenance," said Chuck Mai, vice president of public affairs for AAA Oklahoma. "More big rigs than ever pound our roadways every day thanks to Oklahoma's geographic position as a crossroads of America. Plus, car travel has been increasing as gasoline prices have been falling. And all this as the state faces a budget shortfall in the hundreds of millions of dollars. ODOT does a very good job with the dollars they have to work with – the problem is they just don't have enough dollars. Oklahoma City and Tulsa are in the same boat."

Road conditions could get even worse in the future as the rate of vehicle travel continues to increase and local and state government find themselves unable to adequately fund road repairs.

With vehicle travel growth rates returning to pre-recession levels and large truck travel anticipated to grow significantly, mounting wear and tear on the nation's urban roads and highways is expected to increase the cost of needed highway repairs. Vehicle travel in the U.S. increased by 15 percent from 2000 to 2015. U.S. vehicle travel during the first eight months of 2016 increased 3.1 percent from the same period in 2015. Travel by large commercial trucks in the U.S. increased by 26 percent from 2000 to 2014 and is anticipated to increase by approximately 72 percent from 2015 to 2030, putting greater stress on the nation's roadways.

"With state and local governments struggling to fund needed road repairs and with federal surface transportation funding falling short of the amount needed to make needed improvements, road conditions are projected to get even worse," said Will Wilkins, TRIP's executive director. "Without adequate investment at the local, state and federal levels, our nation's crumbling pavements will be more than just a nuisance for drivers – they'll be a roadblock to economic growth and quality of life."

These findings were released today by TRIP, a national transportation research group based in Washington, D.C. The report, "Bumpy Roads Ahead: America's Roughest Rides and Strategies to make our Roads Smoother," examines urban pavement conditions, transportation funding, travel trends and economic development. Pavement condition and vehicle operating costs for urban areas with populations of 200,000 or greater can be found in the report and appendices. The charts below detail large and mid-sized urban areas with the highest share of pavements on major locally and state-maintained roads and highways in poor condition and the highest vehicle operating costs.