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Bad roads in New Orleans cost drivers \$672 extra a year, study says



Construction on Fleur de Lis Drive between 30th Street and Old Hammond Highway is now under way. The city expects the project to end in the summer of 2018. (Photo via roadwork.nola.gov)

By [Wilborn P. Nobles III, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune](#)

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Nearly two-thirds of Louisiana's roads are deteriorating, costing New Orleans area drivers an extra \$672 annually, according to a report released Wednesday (March 29). [TRIP](#), a Washington-based transportation research group, evaluated pavement conditions and additional factors to determine the expenses to those driving along the city's roadways.

The study stated 39 percent of the major roads in New Orleans are in poor condition, which contributes to the annual \$672 vehicle operating costs. Twelve percent of the city's bridges -- 89 of 772 -- are structurally deficient.

When you account for deteriorating roadways, lost time and fuel due to congestion, and traffic crashes where roadway conditions "likely" played a role, the total extra costs surge to \$2,171 per driver annually.

The data researched in the TRIP report, titled "Louisiana Transportation By the Numbers: Meeting the State's Need for Safe, Smooth and Efficient Mobility," comes from 2015 pavement

data from the Federal Highway Administration. The group stressed that the roads are "rough, congested and lack some safety features," which costs Louisiana drivers overall \$6.5 billion annually. That amount includes vehicle depreciation, repair costs, increased fuel consumption and tire wear.

A [2015 TRIP report](#) based on 2013 federal data said drivers in the New Orleans area paid \$713 annually.

Rocky Morretti, director of research for TRIP, said the decrease in vehicle operating costs between the new report and the older report reflects a "small change in pavement data" over time. The city has also experienced a [construction boom](#) in the last decade as it spends close to \$1 billion in federal disaster recovery funding on road projects.

Data shows the cost of driving in Baton Rouge is even greater than in New Orleans. Drivers in Baton Rouge pay a total of \$2,466 a year for the following: \$696 in vehicle operating costs, \$1,262 for congestion-related delays and \$508 from traffic crashes where the road condition played a factor. The study reports that 39 percent of Baton Rouge's roads are also in poor condition. Twenty percent of the city's bridges -- 124 of 613 -- are structurally deficient. Likewise the average driver in Baton Rouge loses 47 hours due to traffic congestion delays.

Traffic congestion in New Orleans causes 45 annual hours of delay for drivers, and Will Wilkins, TRIP's executive director, said conditions "are only going to get worse." He stressed that more funding is needed at the state and local level.

AAA spokesman Don Redman said lawmakers are discussing several possible solutions for improving roads,

which could involve increased vehicle fees in licensing and registration, or an increase in gasoline taxes.

The legislature didn't take any action on gasoline taxes last year, and it remains to be seen when lawmakers will come to a decision on how to fund transportation needs. Redman said it will take "political courage" and transparency from leaders to reach a solution.

"Gasoline prices aren't anywhere near where we saw them just a few years ago where they were \$3.50 a gallon and above, so the environment may be a little better for lawmakers to think 'maybe we could increase the gasoline tax by 8 cents or 10 cents,' he said.

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards and his predecessor Bobby Jindal commissioned a task force to look at transportation funding. Members of the group called for as much as a [23-cent per gallon](#) increase in the tax, but their suggestions have been met with opposition. John Kay, state director of Americans for Prosperity, said last year that new taxes aren't needed even though he supports road improvements.

Redman stressed that cheaper gas prices recently "have been an economic stimulus for the family." Although "there's a number of options available" for transportation funding, Redman said the main recommendation from the task force was a gas tax. Lawmakers, however, "are kind of reluctant about it" because they know an increase would upset residents. He nonetheless stressed that drivers are already paying the costs of using these roads "in a different way" as shown in the TRIP report.

TRIP's report on Louisiana's roads and bridges can be [found online](#).