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Bad roads costing Mississippi drivers

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By Steve Phillips, Reporter



The report suggests roads and bridges that are deteriorated, congested, and lack safety features cost drivers in Mississippi \$2.9 billion annually. (Photo source: WLOX)



Mississippi Department of Transportation Southern District Commissioner Tom King said funding to improve and build new roads and bridges is badly needed. (Photo source: WLOX)

SOUTH MISSISSIPPI (WLOX) - Bad roads and bridges in Mississippi are costing drivers thousands of dollars each year in added vehicle maintenance, lost time and excess fuel. That's the finding of a transportation lobby group called "TRIP", which released a detailed report Thursday.

Transportation is the backbone of the state's economy. But throughout Mississippi, a lack of funding for new road projects is posing a threat.

"According to our report, Mississippi roads and bridges that are deteriorating, congested and that lack some safety features, cost the state's drivers a total of \$2.9 billion each year. That amounts to nearly \$1,300 per driver here in the Gulfport area," said Carolyn Bonifas Kelly, a researcher with TRIP.

Gulfport Mayor Billy Hewes says it's not just an issue here on the coast or in Mississippi.

"There comes a time, and what I'm seeing now as a mayor, not just with our roads, but America's infrastructure is old. And we are seeing challenges at every single level," he said.

The report finds more than half of the state's roadways are in poor or mediocre condition, with 12 percent of the state's bridges having structural deficiencies.

"The reality is, the state faces a significant and growing transportation funding shortfall. And unless Mississippi can increase transportation funding at the local, state and federal levels, many critically needed transportation projects will be left stranded on the drawing board," said Kelly.

"We can't go any further. We feel like we're going backwards if we don't get the funding. Right now with all the maintenance work we have, we're just maintaining what we have. As far as anything new, or roads that's new, or widening like I-10, we need the funding to keep moving forward," said Southern District Transportation Commissioner Tom King.

"The business community always likes it when we can put hard data to an issue. And let that be part of the dialogue. And I think what this report really does is it starts to add a data element that frankly has been missing from some of this," said Ashley Edwards, President of the Gulf Coast Business Council.

The lobby group, "TRIP", is a non-profit research group funded by the transportation industry, including equipment manufacturers, construction companies, and the insurance industry. It has been in existence for 40 years and compiled more than 500 road reports, covering all 50 states.