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TRIP REPORT

Drivers Pay For Poor State Roads

Group Backs Malloy Transportation Plan



By [Don Stacom](#) - [Contact Reporter](#)

HARTFORD — Traffic congestion and cracked, pothole-ravaged roads cost the average driver in the Hartford region just under \$1,700 a year in extra vehicle maintenance, squandered time and wasted fuel, according to a new report.

Decrepit infrastructure plagues Connecticut's highway and bridge network, and it's taking a direct — though hidden — toll on motorists, according to TRIP, a national transportation advocacy group.

It's also putting the state at risk of losing businesses that expect reliable, reasonably speedy ways to ship their products, the organization said.

"Increasingly, companies are looking at the quality of a region's transportation system when deciding where to relocate or expand," according to the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit. "Regions with congested or poorly maintained roads may see businesses relocate to areas with a smoother, more efficient and more modern transportation system."

At a press conference between negotiations on closing the state's budget deficit, TRIP and local transit advocates made a pitch for higher spending on improving Connecticut roads, bridges, transit bus fleets and rail lines.

Senate Majority Leader [Bob Duff](#) joined them to support Gov. Dannel P. Malloy's ambitious but controversial \$100 billion, 30-year transportation renewal proposal. Republican lawmakers have been skeptical about it, and recently a few Democratic legislators have privately conceded the mid-year budget deficit is making them hesitant to continue supporting such a vast initiative.

"This is truly an issue of economic investment," Duff told reporters at the Legislative Office Building. "It's on the minds of chambers of commerce, CEOs and employees all the way from the top to the middle to the bottom."

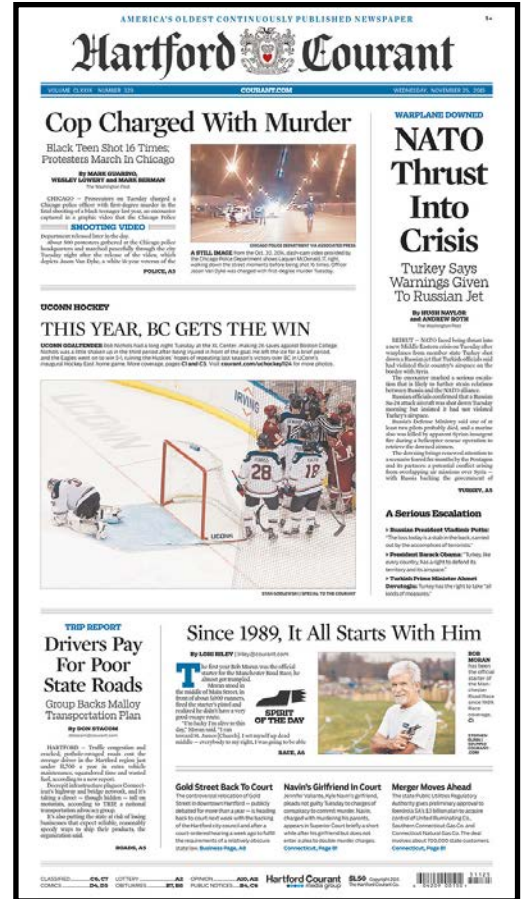
TRIP, which is funded by highway engineering and construction firms, labor unions, transportation advocacy groups and others, has prepared similar reports — with roughly similar conclusions — for about 15 states this year. It acknowledges that most of the country is falling behind in maintaining roads, and cites an American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials estimate of a national \$740 billion backlog of road and bridge repairs.

Congestion and deteriorated roadways cost a total of \$1,875 a year in the Bridgeport-Stamford region, \$1,692 in Greater Hartford and \$1,639 in Greater New Haven, according to TRIP's report. Adding a pro-rated share of the cost of car crashes where deficient roads were partly at fault brings the total to \$2,222 in Bridgeport-Stamford, \$2,236 in Greater Hartford and \$2,050 in Greater New Haven.

About 72 percent of major roads in Greater Hartford are in poor or mediocre condition, and 32 percent of bridges are either deficient or obsolete, according to Rocky Moretti, policy director for TRIP. Fixing all that would be costly, but ultimately would save money for taxpayers over the long run, the organization maintains.

Some Connecticut residents believe Malloy's proposal is mostly to build new highways and futuristic transit systems, but about two-thirds is aimed at overdue maintenance of what's in place now.

FRONT PAGE



"We're in the catch-up mode on roads and bridges," said Lyle Wray, executive director of the Capitol Region Council of Governments. "Most of that \$100 billion is really catching up; it's not Jetsons' teleport terminals."

Malloy has appointed a panel to study ways to fund his plan, with options including tolls, a gas tax increase, tax surcharges, public-private partnerships and various tax incentives to attract private investment.

Opponents contend the \$100 billion is excessive. Republicans last year put out a plan that they said could pump \$37 billion into transportation over the next three decades by putting new priorities on expenses and cutting other bonding.

The full TRIP report is at <http://tinyurl.com/pfdhve6>.