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Study shows high cost of crashes



GREELEY TRIBUNE
Traffic flows through the ramps at the intersection of U.S. 34 and 85. A report released Wednesday by the Trip Organization says Colorado spends 6.8 billion per year because of traffic accidents, wear and tear on vehicles and congestion related to insufficient infrastructure spending.

By Tyler Silvy, tsilvy@greeleytribune.com

Traffic crashes, vehicle maintenance and surging congestion related to deteriorating infrastructure combine to cost Colorado motorists \$6.8 billion each year, according to a study from national transportation organization TRIP.

The report, released Wednesday, uses a variety of standardized formulas to break down the costs associated with inadequate roadways. The report shows annual costs, per driver, for vehicle operation and maintenance, safety and congestion.

Northern Colorado, which researchers said includes Greeley, Loveland and Fort Collins, earned good marks in vehicle maintenance and congestion costs.

With 74 people killed annually, the area was the worst when it came to relative safety.

"We know from a variety of research, roadway safety conditions don't cause many crashes, but they often prevent crashes," said Rocky Moretti, TRIP policy adviser.

The cost of car crashes is estimated by a Federal Highway Administration formula, which takes into account time off work and medical costs. Moretti said TRIP used that formula, plugged in crashes around Colorado, then divided by three (about a third of serious car crashes are the result of poor roadways, Moretti said).

The result, for northern Colorado, is \$575 per year, per licensed driver. It's more than \$100 more per year than Colorado Springs, Denver or Grand Junction. Pueblo is close, at \$571 per year.

Weld County Sheriff's Office spokesman Cpl. Matt Turner said decreasing serious traffic crashes is a big push this year.

Turner said small violations, like rolling through a stop sign, can lead to big consequences. This year, deputies will hand out pamphlets to each motorist they stop. The pamphlets include emotional anecdotes and big numbers. "We're always trying to find a way to make Weld County a safer place," Turner said.

Infrastructure advocates seized on the report as proof of the need for more funding, and they showed support for a potential ballot referendum for a statewide bond issue similar to the \$2-plus billion bond Colorado voters passed in the early 2000s.

"The momentum is really positive and really good with respect to addressing the challenge this year," said Sandra Solin, lobbyist with the Northern Colorado Legislative Alliance.

Greeley Mayor Tom Norton said he's more optimistic this year than in the past, citing higher interest among legislators.

"It's still not easy, because the difference between an adequate solution and a politically feasible solution are quite a ways apart," Norton said.

Norton was director of the Colorado Department of Transportation in the early 2000s when voters passed a statewide infrastructure bond project.

"Bonding is a definitive way to get projects done," Norton said, adding that inflation for road construction costs makes bonds an economical choice.

Still, Norton and others have reservations. Namely, they say there needs to be a dedicated revenue stream for road projects or to pay back bonds going forward.

With the TRIP report finding that 52 percent of major locally and state-maintained roads in northern Colorado urban areas in poor or mediocre condition, and that condition costing drivers an average of \$440 per year in vehicle maintenance, advocates say the time for a fix is here.

The costs of sitting in traffic — 17 hours \$381 per year in northern Colorado — and the projections about the northern Colorado population, which is winding its way toward 1 million people eventually further compound the problem.

"This report underscores that our state must act to solve Colorado's transportation challenges," said David May, president and CEO of the Fort Collins Area Chamber of Commerce. "In addition to commuter

The image shows a thumbnail of the Greeley Tribune newspaper front page. A red box highlights the article titled "Study shows high cost of crashes" under the "TRANSPORTATION" section. Other visible headlines include "WEST SIDE' HARMONY", "MANY ANXIOUS about White House press secretary's statements on recreational marijuana", "LOCAL BUSINESSES NEED SOME CLARITY", "WHAT'S INSIDE", "STING OF DEFEAT", "INSIDE", "UP NEXT", and "WEATHER".

frustration, there are real costs associated with congestion. We need to stop kicking the proverbial can down our deteriorating roads."

THE NUMBERS

Using a variety of standardized formulas, national transportation organization TRIP calculated the cost, per driver, per year, of poor road conditions based on vehicle maintenance, safety and congestion.

Location *VOC Safety Congestion Total
 Colorado Springs \$776 \$406 \$772 \$1,954
 Denver \$753 \$308 \$1,101 \$2,162
 Northern Colorado \$440 \$575 \$381 \$1,396
 Grand Junction \$629 \$423 \$212 \$1,264
 Pueblo \$732 \$571 \$250 \$1,553

*Vehicle Operation Cost

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