

## Traffic costs state \$5.1 billion

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\$5.1 billion: the amount state residents pay each year to address congestion and poor roads in Connecticut each year, according to a new report from the national transportation research group TRIP.

Rocky Moretti, the director of policy and research at TRIP, announced the report's findings at a joint press conference in Hartford last week with representatives from the state government and Connecticut's business community. The results are dire statewide. In the New Haven area, deficient roads and bridges, rampant congestion and a dearth of safety features on roads cost drivers nearly \$2,100 annually, under the average for the Bridgeport and Hartford areas. The TRIP report rates three-quarters of major roads and bridges in the New Haven area as being in either "poor" or "mediocre" condition, just over the average of 72 percent statewide.

And the situation is worsening, the report says. Traffic congestion — which causes 40 annual hours of delay on average in New Haven and 45 in Hartford — has increased in recent years, and TRIP reports that nearly 10 percent of bridges statewide are "structurally deficient" and in need of immediate repairs.

State Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff, who represents the commuter town of Norwalk in Fairfield County, said the report's findings should alert the U.S. Congress of the need for transportation investment.

"This report really comes out at a good time and a very critical time because of the fact that the Congressional bill on transportation is set to expire on Dec. 4 of this year," Duff said. "This is really a call to action to Congress from us here in Connecticut."

Lyle Wray, the executive director of the intermunicipality regional association Capital Region Council of Governments, said the lack of transportation investment on all levels of government is a root cause of Connecticut's transit difficulties. He noted that beginning in 1978, the amount of money the United States spent on infrastructure was equal to only half of the average amount that Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development member countries spent, which contributes to the relatively poor condition of state infrastructure.

"Somewhere around the end of the interstate highway system, we started dropping investments and it's biting us," Wray said at the press conference. "We are now in the catch-up mode with roads, bridges and other parts of our infrastructure. The \$100 billion the governor has put forward — most of that is really for catching up."

The TRIP report comes at a time when transportation issues are attracting an unusual amount of attention in the state. Gov. Dannel Malloy's biennial budget, presented to the General Assembly in February, included a proposal for a \$100 billion "transportation lockbox" to make investments in roads and rail systems around the state. Though it has not yet come before the legislature, a group of state legislators and business representatives have already urged its passage.

Wray called on Connecticut legislators to invest in transportation infrastructure as a means of speeding up job creation and economic growth.

Methods of addressing Connecticut's infrastructure malaise must involve improving public transportation, Moretti said, adding that just under a quarter of all rail bridges in the state are structurally deficient. Wray called for greater availability of public transportation. He pointed to the CTfastrak bus program between Hartford and New Britain — which served its one-millionth rider in September — as an example of the possibilities of state investment in public transit.

Duff said legislators are aware that transportation is typically not in the front of people's minds, and has thus gone under the radar in the General Assembly. He said many Connecticut residents have accepted congestion as an inevitable part of life. But the situation can change, he said.

"It's important that we continue talk about this, that we beat the drum and make sure that people are aware of this," Duff said in Hartford. "It's not their top issue, but we need to make sure it's in their brains and top of mind, because this is really what affects a lot of other things that we talk about in this building."

Transit for Connecticut spokeswoman Karen Burnaska said there is no single solution to road congestion in Connecticut. But increasing public transit options is a route the state should take, she said, adding that public transit is more environmentally friendly than individuals driving their own automobiles.

Some efforts to alleviate strain on Connecticut's roads are underway. Malloy announced Monday that the Connecticut Department of Transportation had resurfaced 330 miles of roadway in the 2015 construction season, up 25 miles from 2014 and 90 miles from 2013. Malloy said in a statement that 2015 marks the fourth consecutive year of increases in road resurfacing.

The state recently completed the new Q Bridge in New Haven after seven years of construction.