

Bad roads, congestion cost average Baton Rouge driver \$2,466 each year, study says

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March 29, 2017

Aging, inadequate roads and safety features cost the average Baton Rouge driver a total of \$2,466 per year in vehicle operating costs, wasted fuel and traffic crashes, a new study on Louisiana's infrastructure says.

The study, released today by the Washington, D.C.-based transportation think tank TRIP, examines the state of Louisiana's infrastructure and its impact on drivers. The cost to Baton Rouge drivers is the highest among the largest urban areas in the state, the study's authors say.

The Capital City also has the worst traffic congestion in the state, the TRIP study says, with each driver losing on average 47 hours each year to the city's crowded roads, and paying \$1,262 on lost time and wasted fuel alone. Meanwhile, Baton Rouge drivers pay \$696 in vehicle operating costs and \$508 in expenses for safety. The report compares Baton Rouge with New Orleans, where drivers lose \$2,171 annually; Lafayette, where drivers lose \$2,024; and Shreveport, where costs run \$1,894.

In total, deteriorating and congested roads cost the state \$6.5 billion each year, the study notes. The TRIP report precedes this spring's upcoming legislative session, during which lawmakers are expected to debate increasing the state's gasoline tax to pay for infrastructure improvements.

State Department of Transportation and Development Secretary Shawn Wilson has in recent months crisscrossed Louisiana, pitching Gov. John Bel Edwards' plan to invest in new roads, bridges and other infrastructure, and citing statistics similar to the TRIP study.

In its report on the study, TRIP highlights the importance of strong infrastructure for Louisiana's bustling agricultural, natural resources and manufacturing industries, as well as its tourism sector. The state risks losing out on new business and

economic opportunities because of aging roads and heavy traffic congestion, the think tank warns.

Baton Rouge leaders have clamored for a new Mississippi River bridge to help alleviate the sometimes daily traffic jams along the Interstate 10 Mississippi River bridge. Edwards, however, has said the state needs more money to pay for that or any other megaproject.

"The TRIP report underscores the absolute urgency that the Louisiana Legislature should act with this year to substantially increase transportation funding," Baton Rouge Area Chamber President and CEO Adam Knapp says in a statement. "It is imperative to not only improve the safety and quality of life of commuters, but also to spur economic growth and job creation. Instead today, millions from our family budgets are being wasted in fuel, vehicle maintenance and lost time."

State officials on a task force dedicated to transportation and infrastructure studied the state's system, concluding earlier this year that Louisiana needs an additional \$700 million per year for roads, bridges, ports and other projects.

Wilson told reporters last month while there is no shortage of requests for road improvement projects, there may not be an appetite among the Republican-dominated Legislature to increase the gasoline tax or otherwise raise \$700 million in new revenue.

The Legislature is already dealing with more immediate problems, including a more than \$400 million budget shortfall for the upcoming fiscal year, and a fiscal cliff in mid-2018 when \$1.4 billion of temporary taxes end.

[See the full news release](#) about Baton Rouge and [read the full state report](#).

—Sam Karlin