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## Report: Bad, congested Louisiana roads costing drivers thousands in Baton Rouge, New Orleans



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ADVOCATE STAFF PHOTO BY BILL FEIG  
DOTD Secretary Shawn Wilson discusses the governor's task force recommendations to boost state aid for roads and bridges by \$700 million per year Monday Feb. 20, 2017, in Baton Rouge, La.

State transportation advocates Wednesday morning seized on a national report that says motorists in Baton Rouge and New Orleans pay \$2,466 and \$2,171 per year respectively because because of poor, congested and unsafe roads and bridges.

Motorists pay \$6.5 billion per year because of the problem, according to a report by TRIP, a national transportation research group.

The announcement came less than two weeks before the start of the 2017 regular legislative session, where a push to increase the state gasoline tax to finance transportation improvements is expected to be a key issue.

Shawn Wilson, secretary for the state Department of Transportation and Development, told reporters the report verifies DOTD numbers.

"We realize that the need is great and the time to do something is now," Wilson said.

Wilson said after the press conference that he expects three or so gas tax bills to be filed, all calling for increases of around 17 cents in the gas tax.

Those measures would raise about \$500 million per year.

TRIP has issued reports critical of transportation in Louisiana for years.

In 2015 the group said Baton Rouge had the 11th-worst roads among midsized cities in America.

In 2010 it said Baton Rouge had the ninth-bumpiest roads among cities with populations of 250,000 to 500,000.

The latest report said two-thirds of major local and state-maintained urban roads are in poor or mediocre condition, 13 percent of such bridges are structurally deficient and the state has the seventh highest rate of traffic crashes in the nation.

Officials said the biggest part of the cost estimates stems from traffic-related delays.

TRIP said traffic backups sparked 47 annual hours of delays for Baton Rouge motorists and cost the average driver \$1,262 in lost time and wasted fuel.

A task force named by Gov. John Bel Edwards recommended that the state spend another \$700 million for road, bridge and other transportation improvements.

However, state budget problems, and the fact tax hikes require two-thirds support in the Legislature, mean that finding solutions will be a challenge.

In addition, some groups contend the state is doing a poor job of spending current dollars.

Ann Trappey, a Baton Rouge engineer who served on the task force, said while a \$700 million increase is significant it is needed to turn around the state's dreary road and bridge statistics.

Motorists pay 38.4 cents per gallon in state and federal taxes.

That includes 20 cents in state taxes, with 16 cents per gallon for rank-and-file projects.

The state has a \$13 billion list of road and bridge needs and a \$16 billion list of "mega" projects, including a new bridge across the Mississippi River in Baton Rouge.

Adam Knapp, president and CEO of the Baton Rouge Area Chamber, noted that an LSU poll released earlier this week showed public support for a hike in the state gasoline tax.

"This is an urgent issue," Knapp said.

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