

State's rough roads cost drivers \$8.3B

Study's timing coincides with ballot question on gas tax repeal



BRIDGE WORK: Construction on the John Greenleaf Whittier Bridge connecting Amesbury and Newburyport over the Merrimack River on I-95 continues last night.

By [Matt Stout](#)

The Bay State's dilapidated network of highways and bridges is draining Massachusetts drivers of a whopping \$8.3 billion annually thanks to its shoddy roads and drive-time gridlock, according to a new study that is adding fuel to the gas tax debate ahead of an Election Day ballot question.

The 21-page report released yesterday by TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based research outfit, says nearly one-fifth of the state's major roadways are in poor condition, helping cost drivers more in repairs, accident-related expenses and fuel-chugging traffic delays each year.

"This should be a light on the dashboard: 'If you don't fix me now, it could cost four or five times more in the future,'" said Rocky Moretti, TRIP's director of policy and research who crisscrossed the state yesterday in a series of events in Boston, Springfield and New Bedford to roll out the study's findings.

"I'm having our findings confirmed firsthand," he said of traveling the state's highways. "As you have an older system and it's heavily traveled, you have to invest adequately."

Moretti said TRIP timed the release of the study two weeks before the election to help "educate" voters ahead of Nov. 4, when they'll weigh a ballot question

asking residents to repeal the 2013 law that ties automatic gas tax hikes to inflation.

Activists and Republican officials, who say lawmakers should vote to raise taxes instead of relying on an automatic hike, are pushing Question 1 against a coalition of transportation and business groups, who argue the measure will help fund long-planned transportation projects.

Moretti said the group hasn't taken a stance on the ballot question, but repeal opponents were invited to its various press conferences, where they jumped on the study to back up their battle cry to keep the tax in place. TRIP also counts among its past donors the Construction Industries of Massachusetts, which gave money to the nonprofit in 2008 and has endorsed the question's opponents.

"We all have a lot at stake in the future of Massachusetts in defeating the question," said Michael Widmer, president of the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, which argues that tying the tax to inflation will cost each driver roughly \$5 more per year. "There are public safety issues, economic issues, convenience issues. Maintaining roads and bridges is not a luxury."

State Rep. Geoff Diehl, a Whitman Republican who is among the repeal's most vocal proponents, said the state should be "embarrassed people aren't getting their money's worth" in road repairs and maintenance.

He also pointed to a study last month by the Los Angeles-based Reason Foundation that found that Massachusetts is spending as much as four times the national average to repair its roadways, but the state's highway system ranks near the bottom of the list nationally.

"We're not debating that infrastructure is an issue," Diehl said. "But I can tell you that as far as consumers who have to drive from here on out, they'll have a gas tax that will go up automatically without a vote forever."