

Report: W.Va. Roads Cost Taxpayers \$1.4 Billion Annually in Vehicle Maintenance, Lost Time

By [Ashton Marra](#) • 4 hours ago



The West Virginia Senate.
Will Price / West Virginia Legislative
Photography



A national research group says the deficiencies, congestion, and lack of safety features on West Virginia's roadways are costing drivers in the state more than a billion dollars every year.

Gov. Jim Justice plans to drastically change that by increasing the funding to the state's road system, but members of the Senate have mixed feelings about whether that plan can succeed.

The report, released at the Capitol Thursday by TRIP, a national transportation research group based in D.C., says each year, West Virginia drivers pay an additional \$1.4 billion in vehicle maintenance, the cost of traffic accidents, and wasted gasoline and time because of the poor condition of the state's roads.

TRIP's executive director, Will Wilkins, said during a press conference that averages out to more than \$1,000 per West Virginian per year.

TRIP, the group that wrote the report on West Virginia's roadways, receives funding from manufacturing, labor, construction, and engineering groups from across the country.

They were invited to Charleston to present their latest report by the Contractors Association of West Virginia, a lobbying group that works to promote the interests of the construction industry in the state.

The report didn't come as a surprise to the few members of the Legislature who attended the press conference, but Department of Transportation Secretary Tom Smith said it's one more reminder that the state needs to change its funding structure.

"If you look at the numbers over several years, you can really see this continued slippage," he said during the press conference.

"It really makes the point that Gov. Justice has asked us to look at in transportation, that the longer we go, the behinder we get and we can't afford to not invest in infrastructure."

Gov. Jim Justice presented his plan to fix the state's roads during his state of the state address last week.

His plan includes increasing the gasoline tax by 10 cents, raising the fees drivers pay at the Division of Motor Vehicles, and hiking the price of tolls on the turnpike by \$1 to create a revenue stream to bond.

That bond, which he estimates could be as large as \$2.8 billion, will drastically improve the state's economy, according to the new governor.

"I'll tell you what it will do," Justice said during the speech. "It will create 48,000 jobs in our state. 48,000 jobs. It will complete the network that we have got to do. It will make you tourism explode in this state."

Democratic Senator Bob Beach from Monongalia County said his constituents in Morgantown deal with congestion on a daily basis and those in the rural areas struggle with the lack of maintenance.

Beach supports passage of the governor's proposal, raising the gasoline tax, increasing DMV fees, and hiking tolls, and said will allow West Virginia to focus the money it already has on maintaining roads instead of splitting it with the cost of new construction.

That benefits the West Virginians that the TRIP report says are already paying extra as a result of poor road conditions, Beach said.

"My perspective is if we get this package, the Governor's proposal package, passed in its entirety, that allows us to take the fund that we have in place now that we're trying to do everything with, trying to build new roads and repair them and just general maintenance, that allows us to take that entire fund and focus on the little county routes that we have across the state, and we have a lot of them, 36,000 miles of them," he said.

Senate Transportation Chair Greg Boso said parts of the governor's package appeal to him.

He'd like to keep the tolls on the state turnpike and could even agree to raise those tolls if West Virginians are not asked to pay the higher fee, but the other pieces of the proposal, like the gasoline tax, he's less sure about it.

"We've got to be cautious about that because we've got a number of people in the local home communities where they struggle every year, every day just to make enough money to put enough gas in the gas tank so they can make it to work and do the things they need to do."

But Beach said his fellow lawmakers don't have to vote to increase those taxes and fees. They have to vote to allow a bond proposal to be placed on the ballot during the next election.

"We're taking that to the consumer," he said. "We're allowing the voters to make a decision in the ultimate outcome in this."