


LOCAL

"We are all connected"

PSALM members present art exhibit.

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Morgantown, WV

THE DOMINION

Post


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SPORTS

Area swimmers pool efforts

Hawks' Shaver gets a shot at four titles.

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FRIDAY TRIP: Bad roads cost \$1.4B

Feb. 17, 2017

Report: Morgantown drivers deal with highest expenses

DAVID BEARD
The Dominion Post

CHARLESTON — West Virginia's bad roads cost motorists \$1.4 billion annually, through higher vehicle operating costs, accidents and traffic delays, according to a report by national transportation research group TRIP.

Morgantown drivers face the highest costs among the five largest urban areas — also including Charleston, Huntington, Parkersburg and Wheeling — at \$1,439 per driver annually, TRIP said.

Investment in roads is sorely needed, TRIP said.

The annual report was released Thursday morning, during a press conference at the Capitol also attended by legislators and other leaders.

"This report is alarming. This is terrible news," new Transportation Secretary Tom Smith said. The report shows continued decline in road and bridge quality.

"We really can't afford to not invest in infrastructure."

Gov. Jim Justice's proposals to build and maintain roads, Smith said, would cost drivers somewhere from \$120 to \$150 per driver per year. "These modest increases that you have to actually improve our program here are, I think, clearly needed."

TRIP looks at three types of costs that affect drivers: Vehicle operating costs (VOCs), safety (crashes) and congestion (wasted fuel and lost time). Morgantown's VOC cost is highest of the five, at \$815. Safety costs are lowest, at \$313. Congestion costs are second-lowest, at \$313. Charleston is highest, at \$481; Wheeling is lowest, at \$275.

West Virginia had 1.2 million licensed drivers in 2015, TRIP said. Of the state's major roads, 29 percent are in poor condition, 55 percent are mediocre or fair and only 17 percent are good. Poor roads are deteriorated, with rutting, cracks and potholes. Some can be fixed, but some have to be rebuilt.

Among the cities, Morgantown's roads are the worst, with 47 percent poor, compared to 37 percent for the next closest, Wheeling. Huntington fares the best, with only 16 percent poor.

Statewide, bridge condition continues to decline. In 2014, 13 percent were structurally deficient — of -ten requiring posting for lower weight or closure — placing 12th worst nationally. The percentage rose to 15 percent in 2015, eighth worst. In 2016, it was 17 percent, fifth worst.

In Morgantown, 29 of 202 bridges are deficient, 14 percent. Wheeling is worst, with 19 percent; Parkersburg is best, with 4 percent.

For highway deaths, West Virginia is worse than the national average, at 1.35 per 100 million vehicle miles, compared to 1.13 nationally. It's worse on rural roads, at 2.24 deaths per 100 million miles.

Morgantown sees and average of 12 fatalities per year, the best among the cities. Huntington and Charleston are worst, at 25 and 24, respectively.

Adequate roads promote not only safety, but economic development, TRIP said. "Businesses rely on an efficient and dependable transportation system to move products and services."

In his State of the State speech, Justice proposed several measures to address road problems.

He wants to raise the gasoline tax by 10 cents a gallon, from 20.5 cents to 30.5 cents. The turnpike would see a toll hike from \$2 to \$3. The fee to get or renew a vehicle license plate would climb from \$30 to \$50, plus an additional \$8 turnpike fee.

Justice plans to use the gas and fee revenue to leverage bonds to build roads via two bond issues in two phases, totaling \$2.8 billion. As often discussed, the construction bonds would free regular Road Fund money for maintenance.

Sen. Bob Beach, former Senate Transportation chairman and still a committee member, was at the presentation.

Asked about Justice's proposals, he said, "They're on the right track." It's bringing ideas to the table, something the previous administration didn't do.

"We've heard some alarming numbers here," he said, "and I think it kind of justifies what the governor wants to do." He wants to see the actual bill that comes to the Senate.

FRONT PAGE

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Weather
FRIDAY Feb. 17, 2017
44°
44°
44°

Trump raps 21st-century Black, 21st-century media, 21st-century judges
BY DAVID BEARD
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DEA program targets opioid traffickers
BY DAVID BEARD
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3 arrested in N. Korean death
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Area swimmers pool efforts
Hawks' Shaver gets a shot at four titles.
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Preston pets search for new homes
20 animals surrendered after dog tax checks
BY KATY FLEM
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Mother files bullying suit against BOE
Says biracial daughter was harassed at LHS
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GOP struggles for consensus on health law
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Meanwhile, in caucus, there's some discussion of proposing additional DMV fees to raise additional Road Fund money.

"The governor's going to have to sell his plan," Beach said. Then it's up to the voters to approve the bond measures.

Delegate Dave Pethel, D-Wetzel, also was there. "We have serious problems with our roads, our bridges and infrastructure," Pethel said. "I certainly believe that Gov. Justice wants to address that in a big way. I hope that the Legislature will step up and address road and bridge funding."

Eldon Callen, with the Morgantown Area Chamber of Commerce, said in a press release, "The question before us now is whether today's leadership will address basic infrastructure needs of our state or again kick it down the road. We are paying dearly in money and lives for poor roads."