

Billings Gazette

Making his mark

Marc Matthews hoping his hot stretch translates to success for MSUB **SPORTS, PAGE D1**



Fast-casual food

Five Guys Burgers and Fries to open Billings restaurant Thursday **LOCAL & STATE, PAGE B1**



MOSTLY SUNNY 15 • 4 FORECAST, B6 | **THURSDAY, JANUARY 12, 2017** | billingsgazette.com

Report: Aging infrastructure removes \$1K annually from each driver's wallet

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Each year the average Billings motorist spends \$1,113 in vehicle operating costs, including congestion-related delays and traffic crashes, simply by traveling on local roadways that a coalition of businesses and local governments want to make safer and smoother.

With a noisy backdrop of trucks being repaired in the shop at Motor Power Equipment, the Montana Infrastructure Coalition helped roll out a [new report](#) Thursday, "Montana Transportation by the Numbers: Meeting the State's Need for Safe, Smooth and Efficient Mobility."

TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based national nonprofit transportation research organization, released the report Thursday.

Darryl James, the infrastructure coalition's executive director, said the group will soon identify a legislative sponsor for a bill that would increase the state's share of the fuel tax by 10 cents per gallon. That would add about \$80 million annually to transportation coffers, with about half going to local governments.

James said that under the bill, the share to city and county government road departments in Yellowstone County would increase by about \$5 million annually, from \$2 million to about \$7 million.

"Frankly, I think the discussion (among state legislators) has changed," James said. "There is no cash. We can't match the federal dollars available (for transportation projects) today, and we have to come up with a solution to that. This is a sustainable flow of revenue, not an immediate fix, and there are no specific projects included."

"Our current infrastructure is a liability," he said, "and we can't let it deteriorate."

The announcement came even as legislators and Gov. Bullock were also working on a fix.

According to the TRIP report, half of the major roads in the Billings area are in poor or mediocre condition. Local road conditions cost the average motorist \$592 per year in extra vehicle operating costs, including accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs and increased fuel consumption and tire wear. That figure is part of the \$1,113 figure cited above.

Traffic congestion in Billings, the report states, causes an hour of delay each month for average motorists, robbing each driver of \$268 in lost time and wasted fuel annually.

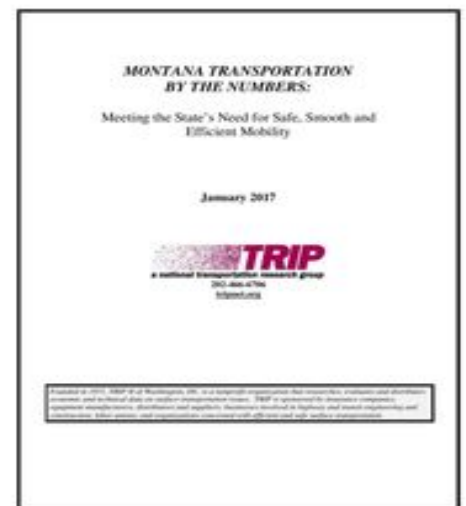
According to the report, \$101 billion in goods are shipped to and from sites in Montana, mostly by truck.

The report comes at a time when the Montana Department of Transportation

estimates it will face an annual funding shortfall of \$874 million through 2021. In addition, vehicle miles traveled in Montana increased by 32 percent from 2000 to 2015 — from 9.9 billion in 2000 to 13 billion in 2015. That increase was the fifth-largest percentage increase in the nation. When adjusted for inflation, Montana's Gross Domestic Product increased by 43 percent over the same time period, the seventh-most nationally.

"Those are positive signs," said Rocky Moretti, director of policy and research for TRIP, "but it's a significant increase to the pounding that the system is taking."

The release of Thursday's report included representatives from a number of companies involved in transportation and construction.



[Montana Transportation by the Numbers](#)

TRIP, a national transportation research group