

TRIP Report: Poor roadways cost Montanans \$794 million a year

By ABC FOX MT News Staff

Roads and bridges that are deteriorated, congested or lack safety features cost Montana motorists a total of \$794 million statewide annually – as much as \$1,417 per driver in some urban areas.

The cost is due to higher vehicle operating costs, traffic crashes and congestion-related delays, according to a [new report released by TRIP](#), a Washington, DC based national nonprofit transportation research organization.

These costs come at a time when the Montana Department of Transportation estimates it will face an annual funding shortfall of \$874 million through 2021, causing many projects to be halted or delayed.

MDT has delayed \$144.5 million in road projects that had been scheduled to begin in 2017.

The TRIP report finds that throughout Montana, 34-percent of major urban roads are in poor condition and nearly one-fifth of Montana's bridges are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete.

Driving on deteriorated roads costs Montana drivers an additional \$296 million each year in extra vehicle operating costs, including accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs, and increased fuel consumption and tire wear.

The TRIP report calculates the cost to motorists of insufficient roads in the Billings, Great Falls and Missoula urban areas. A breakdown of the costs per motorist in each area along with a statewide total is below.

"We've been talking about our failing infrastructure and lack of funding for a long time now and have very little to show for all that hand-wringing," said

Darryl James, executive director of the Montana Infrastructure Coalition. "It's time for a little less talk and a lot more action."

TRIP findings on bridges:

- A total of 18 percent of Montana's bridges show significant deterioration or do not meet modern design standards.
- Eight percent of Montana's bridges are structurally deficient, with significant deterioration to the bridge deck, supports or other major components.
- An additional ten percent of the state's bridges are functionally obsolete, which means they no longer meet modern design standards, often because of narrow lanes, inadequate clearances or poor alignment.

"The Montana Infrastructure Coalition is bringing a balanced package of bills supported by a broad spectrum of Montanans," said Webb Brown, president and CEO of the Montana Chamber of Commerce. "We expect some tough discussions but believe Montana's lawmakers are ready to step to the plate and work on real solutions to these very real problems. We're anxious to share our research and data to play a central role in that discussion."

"Our transportation system is truly the network that binds our communities together in Montana," said Steve Arveschoug, executive director of the Big Sky Economic Development Authority. "Our economic security depends on smart investment in infrastructure and it begins with clean water and roads and bridges that are safe and efficient."

The state's traffic fatality rate is the third



highest in the nation. Montana's major urban roads are becoming increasingly congested, with drivers wasting significant amounts of time and fuel each year according to TRIP.

Traffic crashes in Montana claimed the lives of 1,024 people between 2010 and 2014. Montana's overall traffic fatality rate of 1.58 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel is significantly higher than the national average of 1.08 and is the third highest in the nation. The fatality rate on Montana's rural non-Interstate roads was 2.41 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel in 2014, approximately three times higher than the 0.79 fatality rate on all other roads and highways in the state.

Location	VOC	Safety	Congestion	TOTAL
Billings	\$592	\$253	\$268	\$1,113
Great Falls	\$872	\$311	\$234	\$1,417
Missoula	\$538	\$280	\$334	\$1,152
Montana - Statewide	\$296 million	\$328 million	\$170 million	\$794 million