

KECI – Thursday, January 12, 2017

Report claims over one-third of Montana roads in poor condition

By: [Montana MacLachlan](#)



MISSOULA, Mont. - Deficient roads and bridges are costing Missoula drivers nearly \$1,200 a year according to a road report released Thursday by D.C.-based nonprofit engineering research group TRIP.

TRIP's report claims 34 percent of Montana's urban roads are in poor condition.

"What we're seeing in Montana mostly is a lack of adequate funding," said TRIP's associate director for research and communication, Carolyn Kelly. Kelly said they've completed road reports for almost 25 states. "Because of (the lack of funding) Montana's transportation system is becoming increasingly deteriorated and inefficient. Montana's traffic fatality rate is one of the highest in the nation."

The report analyzes three Montana cities -- Great Falls, Billings and Missoula -- and indicated bridges and roads in Missoula are experiencing some of the worst conditions.

TRIP's report states nearly one-third of bridges in Missoula either don't meet modern design standards or have significantly deteriorated.

Downtown Missoula's Madison Street Bridge is just one example. Sections of the sidewalk overpass have been closed for several months because the concrete's deteriorated so significantly, the bridge was deemed unsafe for

drivers and pedestrians who travel along the riverfront trail below.

Construction is in progress on Madison Street, but that's not the case for other bridges in Missoula like Russell Street and Reserve Street.

TRIP's report claims the road deficiencies are also coming at a time when the Montana Department of Transportation is facing millions of dollars of a budget shortfall.

Jim Skinner, with MDT, says TRIP's report outlined a "continuation of the trend where transportation infrastructure needs far outpace the resources available."

He added their focus is to maintain and preserve the existing system, and they would not let bridges with significant safety concerns to remain in operation. Skinner didn't say if they anticipate any projects to be cut or postponed.

Some Missoulians say they'd be willing to pay more in taxes if it means better roads.

"For me, as long as that money is going toward viable infrastructure and stuff that we need to spend money on, I do not have a problem paying my taxes, that's what I'm paying them for, to have the government supply those services," said resident Brock Gnose.

Others feel they're already footing a significant part of the bill and would only be willing to pay more under certain conditions.

"If I know (infrastructure) is where my money is going to go," said Marcus Kittles.

Both Gnose and Kittles say they've noticed a significant increase of potholes in the Missoula area this winter.

"The roads always take a hit during the winter, especially in a winter like this," Gnose added.

The Montana Infrastructure Coalition is trying to do something about the problem. Darryl James began the organization after transportation and infrastructure bills failed last legislative session.

James says the group introduced four new bills this legislative session.

The Montana Chamber of Commerce also weighed in on Thursday's report. CEO Webb Brown said these organizations need to be more than supporters but also leaders.

"The Montana Chamber has long supported investing in our infrastructure. More recently, though, we have realized that we need to be more than just supporters -- we need to be leaders. In fact, one of the major objectives of our new 10-year strategic plan, Envision 2026, is to produce an increase in infrastructure investment," Webb said.

James agrees.

"Everybody's been talking about infrastructure investment for years, and it's time to stop the talk and start some action. We're long overdue," he added."

"Montana drivers are paying the price because they're driving on a system that is deteriorated, is congested and not as safe as it could be. In Missoula it costs drivers thousands of dollars every year," Kelly added.

You can read [TRIP's full report here](#).