

Deficient Roadways Cost Montana Motorists \$794 Million Annually

Helena, MT – Roads and bridges that are deteriorated, congested or lack desirable safety features cost Montana motorists a total of \$794 million statewide annually – as much as \$1,417 per driver in some urban areas - due to higher vehicle operating costs, traffic crashes and congestion-related delays, according to a new report released today by TRIP, a Washington, DC based national nonprofit transportation research organization. These high costs come at a time when the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) estimates it will face an annual funding shortfall of \$874 million through 2021, causing many needed projects to be halted or delayed. Increased investment in transportation improvements at the local, state and federal levels could improve road, bridge and transit conditions, boost safety, relieve traffic congestion and support long-term economic growth in Montana.

The TRIP report, “Montana Transportation by the Numbers: Meeting the State’s Need for Safe, Smooth and Efficient Mobility,” 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. 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.

The MDT estimates it will face an \$874 million average annual shortfall through 2021 in the investment level needed to make further progress in improving road, highway and bridge conditions; improving traffic safety; and, completing needed modernization improvements to enhance economic development opportunities. As a result of a lack of transportation funding, MDT has delayed \$144.5 million in road projects that had been scheduled to begin in 2017.

Driving on deficient roads costs Montana drivers \$794 million per year in the form of extra vehicle operating costs (VOC) as

a result of driving on roads in need of repair, lost time and fuel due to congestion-related delays, and the costs of traffic crashes in which roadway features likely were a contributing factor. 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.

The TRIP report finds that 34 percent of major urban roads in Montana are in poor condition, while 40 percent are rated in mediocre or fair condition and the remaining 26 percent are in good condition. 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.

“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.”

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.”

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.

“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.”

Traffic congestion in Montana is worsening, costing the state’s drivers \$170 million annually in lost time and wasted fuel.

The efficiency and condition of Montana’s transportation system, particularly its highways, is critical to the health of the state’s economy. Annually, \$101 billion in goods are shipped to and from sites in Montana, mostly by truck. Sixty-seven percent of the goods shipped annually to and from sites in Montana are carried by trucks and another 12 percent are carried by courier services or multiple mode deliveries, which include trucking.

“Conditions will worsen and additional projects will be delayed if greater funding is not made available at the state and local levels,” said Will Wilkins, TRIP’s executive director. “Without adequate investment, Montana’s roads and bridges will become increasingly deteriorated, inefficient and unsafe, hampering economic growth and quality of life.”