

Bad roads and bridges cost N.J. drivers more than you might think



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New Jersey's bad roads and bridges are costing individual drivers almost \$2,000, and contribute to higher numbers of fatal crashes, a new report shows. (Robert Sciarrino | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com)

A report to be released Thursday morning gave the bad news that's hardly a surprise, New Jersey's bad roads and bridges are costing individual drivers almost \$2,000, contribute to higher numbers of fatal crashes on rural roads and cost consumers more money at stores.

The report doesn't stop at the \$1,951 in added costs per driver, based on 2012 numbers. It blamed bad roads and bridges for costing a total of \$11.8 billion in additional costs for driver to operate their vehicles. It found that in 2013, 35 percent of the state's major roads are in poor condition, 41 percent are rated in "mediocre" conditions and 24 percent are ranked good.

The report by [TRIP](#), a non-profit transportation research group, broke down [the additional costs for drivers](#) by category - \$605 in added vehicle operating costs for repairs, vehicle depreciation and added fuel consumption for rough roads.

Traffic crashes and the cost of injuries and lost productivity adds \$485 to the vehicle costs. Finally, sitting in backed-up traffic is the biggest cost to individual drivers, sucking \$861 out of their wallets annually.

Poor road conditions mean that the pavement has potholes, is rutted and cracked. While some of those roads can have the old pavement ground off and be repaved, many are too far gone and have to be reconstructed, which is more expensive, the report found.

In a week where one bridge was closed and state transportation officials [ordered stepped up inspections of the worst bridges](#) and closed one lane and barred trucks from a [Route 3 bridge over the Hackensack River](#), the report said 36 percent of the states bridges need to be replaced, repaired or improved.

The report said 10 percent of the states bridges are considered structurally deficient, meaning they can no longer carry the weight they were originally designed to. Another 26 percent of the state's bridges are functionally obsolete, meaning that lanes are too narrow or shoulders don't meet current design standards.

On the safety issue, the report said that the fatality rate on rural non-interstate roads is 2.5 higher than all other roads in the state. Improvements that could prevent or reduce the severity of some of those crashes include lighting, better lane markings, rumble strips, guard rails or features in intersections such as left turn lanes.

The TRIP report estimated that road condition were a contributing factor in about one third of fatal crashes.

The report also warned that in addition to congestion adding to the cost of shipping consumer goods, food and freight by truck, it also is a factor when a company considers locating or staying in the state.

Highway accessibility was ranked the number one site selection factor in a 2011 survey of corporate executives by

Area Development Magazine, the report said.

While the report didn't make specific recommendations about how to raise new revenue to replenish the states soon-to-be-bankrupt Transportation Trust Fund, it did mention the past debt will hamstring the states ability to tackle bad roads and bridges.

"New Jersey's efforts to improve its transportation system will be hindered by the state's need to pay off outstanding debt," the report said.

TRIP, a non-profit research group, is funded by insurance companies, equipment manufacturers, distributors and suppliers, businesses involved in highway and transit engineering and construction, labor unions, and organizations concerned with safe and efficient surface transportation, according to its website.

The report is to be released at a presentation by the New Jersey Alliance for Action, a business group which also advocates for infrastructure improvement, will also be presented to Fox at the gathering in Edison, Thursday morning.

The data that the report is based on comes primarily from federal sources, including the Federal Highway Administration, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Texas Transportation Institute,

Formed in 1971, TRIP has issued about 500 reports covering all 50 states, she said. While the reports generally cover all transportation modes, the New Jersey report will focus on roads and bridges.

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