

New York roads, bridges in need of fixes



Meaghan M. McDermott

Staff writer

Ill-maintained roadways in New York cost state drivers an additional \$6.3 billion in annual vehicle operating costs, or approximately \$402 every year per motorist in the Rochester area.

That's according to a [report issued on Thursday by TRIP](#), a national transportation research group sponsored by insurance and construction interests.

The group says for New York to maintain its quality of life and economic competitiveness, as well as spur additional economic growth, transportation systems here must be better maintained and modernized.

"The challenge is to start to move those poor roads in to fair and good condition where they can be maintained much more cost-effectively," said Rocky Moretti, TRIP's director of policy and research during a visit to Gates Automotive to discuss the report.

The latest state-wide numbers, Moretti said, show that 37 percent of major urban roads in New York have pavement in poor condition and 43 percent are in mediocre or fair condition.

In Rochester, 21 percent of roads have pavement in poor condition and

another 16 percent are in mediocre condition.

"Last year we were reporting 17 percent of major roads in Rochester were in poor condition," he said. "Unfortunately, we're seeing that same trend of things getting worse, and we haven't seen the data in terms of what this winter has meant in terms of pavement conditions."

Renee Terreri, vice-president of AAA of Western and Central NY, called for legislative attention on the issue.

"New York state roads and bridges are deteriorating and it's drivers who are bearing the costs," she said, noting that AAA last year serviced more than 180,000 calls for flat tires in the state, more than 15,000 in Rochester alone. "The state really has to invest in its infrastructure in an ambitious, yet fiscally sound manner."

Among other findings, the group estimated that more than a third of the state's bridges are structurally deficient or don't meet modern design standards. The lack of infrastructure repair funding was a subject broached earlier this month by the Genesee Transportation Council, which developed and released [a planning tool municipalities could use](#) to determine which bridges might be able to be closed with the least amount of disruption if more money for fixes isn't forthcoming.

The TRIP report did not say where additional funding for roads and bridges should come from.

But Mark Assini, Gates town supervisor, said it's a matter of priorities.

"The issue we are facing without roads and bridges is an issue of public safety, it is an issue impacting the economy and an issue impacting the ability of our businesses to grow," he said. "Quite frankly, the money that should be going

towards roads and bridges is being siphoned off for other things that aren't a priority."

Indeed, state Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli has pointed out that the state's Dedicated Highway and Bridge Trust, which is funded by gas taxes and other fees, is largely being used to pay for debt service and day-to-day operations for the state Department of Transportation and Department of Motor Vehicles, not for bridge repairs. The fund disbursed more than \$3.8 billion in the 2012-13 fiscal year, but spent only 22 percent of that on construction.

"Our state and federal officials should be responsible with the money that's collected — taxpayers' money that's supposed to be dedicated to our roads and bridges," said Assini. "We have the money, it's not being spent in the right place."

Assini also decried disproportionate state spending on downstate interests, including more than \$1 billion this year for work on replacing the Tappan Zee Bridge.

"We have the 390/490 interchange, which has a greater need, the bridges are lower rated than the Tappan Zee and we get 50 percent more traffic than the Tappan Zee and yet we get no funding," he said.

DOT announced in the early 2010s that reconstruction of the interchange of Interstates 390 and 490 and Route 31, or Lyell Avenue, in Gates would begin in 2014. But the work has been delayed due to funding issues. [According to the DOT website](#), the first phase of the project — replacing the Lyell Avenue bridge — is still slated to begin in this year, but the [schedule page](#) is blank.

MCDERMOT@DemocratandChronicle.com