



Research group says poor roads cost Oklahoma motorists \$5 billion a year



by [Randy Ellis](#)

Driving on deteriorated, inadequate and congested roads is costing the average Oklahoma City motorist an extra \$2,175 a year, according to a new report issued Wednesday by TRIP, a national transportation research group.

Statewide, it's costing Oklahoma motorists an extra \$5 billion a year, said Rocky Moretti, director of policy and research for the nonprofit group based in Washington, D.C.

Moretti, whose group is supported by a variety of transportation organizations, has been hopscoching across the nation releasing state reports that highlight the hidden costs of poor road conditions.

During a news conference Wednesday, Moretti acknowledged that it is not a coincidence that he was releasing TRIP's Oklahoma report at a time when the Oklahoma Legislature is considering cuts in transportation funding as it seeks to fill an \$878 million budget hole.

TRIP tries to put out reports at "times when we think very critical decisions" are being made, he said.

Mike Patterson, executive director of the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, spoke briefly at the news conference and

urged the Legislature to pass a motor fuels tax increase.

"We think it's necessary that something be done with a motor fuels tax increase simply because we know the department is going to receive a cut (in appropriations) as we have in six of the last eight years," he said.

The new TRIP report breaks down the hidden extra costs that Oklahoma City motorists have to pay each year into three broad categories: vehicle operating costs (\$832), the economic costs of avoidable traffic crashes (\$233) and traffic congestion costs (\$1,110).

Seventy-nine percent of the Oklahoma City urban area's major locally and state-maintained roads are in poor or mediocre condition, Moretti said, adding that the rough roads cost the average Oklahoma City motorist an additional \$832 a year in extra vehicle operating costs.

Those costs include such things as additional repair costs, accelerated vehicle depreciation and increased fuel consumption and tire wear, he said.

"It's absolutely critical that improvements are made sooner rather than later," Moretti said. "It's estimated that every dollar of deferred maintenance costs \$4 or \$5 down the road when those repairs become far more expensive."

The report stated that the average motorist in the Oklahoma City area spends an extra 49 hours a year stuck in traffic congestion.

"This is time lost due to a transportation system that lacks the reliability to get people to places as quickly as they should," he said.

That costs the typical Oklahoma City driver \$1,110 a year in lost time and wasted fuel, he said.

Roadway safety issues that lead to traffic accidents cost the average Oklahoma City motorist an additional \$233, Moretti said.

TRIP estimates that roadway features are likely a contributing factor in about one-

third of all fatal and serious traffic accidents. An average of 77 motorists died in Oklahoma City traffic accidents each year from 2013 to 2015, the report said.

Roadway features that impact safety include the number of lanes, lane widths, lighting, lane markings, rumble strips, shoulders, guard rails, other shielding devices, median barriers and intersection designs, the TRIP report said. Economic costs attributed to traffic crashes include work and household productivity losses, property damage, medical costs, rehabilitation costs, legal and court costs, congestion costs and emergency services.

Tulsa motorists fare only slightly better than Oklahoma City drivers when it comes to the extra costs they have to pay each year because of road conditions.

The average Tulsa motorist ends up paying an extra \$2,092 a year, including \$859 in extra vehicle operating costs, \$249 in traffic crash costs and \$984 in congestion costs, the report said.

Moretti did credit Oklahoma officials with making dramatic improvements to the state's bridges, noting that a decade ago, Oklahoma led the country in structurally deficient bridges, but now just 15 percent locally and state-maintained bridges remain structurally deficient.

That's still the eighth highest rate in the nation, so Oklahoma still has a ways to go, the report noted.

"The outcome of this Legislative session will be critical to the future condition of the state's transportation system and how it impacts the public," he said.