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## Group wants more road funds

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LINCOLN — A national transportation group, bidding to get increased funding for road construction in Nebraska, said Tuesday that poor roads cost the average Omaha driver an estimated \$1,113 a year in extra vehicle maintenance and lost productivity.

The report from TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based national transportation organization, comes as the Nebraska Legislature considers whether to earmark more funds for road maintenance and construction.

Funding for state road construction has declined in recent years, with \$325 million devoted to construction this year in Nebraska compared with \$380 million in 2005. State roads officials have predicted that Nebraska will soon have no funds to build new roads, only money to repair existing highways.

That has inspired legislative proposals to earmark a half-cent of the state's current 5-cent sales tax for road construction, increase the state's fuel tax and increase fees paid on older cars.

TRIP estimated that bad roads cost Omahans an average \$587 a year in accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs and increased fuel and tire expenses because, in 2008, 74 percent of its streets and Interstates were in poor or mediocre condition.

That expense was more than double the estimated cost to the average Nebraskan because of the higher percentage of poor and mediocre roads in the city, the TRIP report said.

The report estimated that Omahans also incurred an average of \$113 a year for the cost of serious accidents caused by poor roadway design and that traffic congestion in the Omaha area cost another \$413 a year in wasted fuel and lost productivity.

At a Tuesday press conference, TRIP officials said that Nebraska's roadways would deteriorate even further without additional funding. The State Department of Roads has estimated that the difference between state road needs and available funding will be about \$200 million a year, or \$1.1 billion over the next five years.

The report comes four months after a conservative think tank ranked the Cornhusker State No. 5 in the nation in terms of performance and cost-effectiveness of its roadways as of 2008. The annual ranking done by the Reason Foundation, a Los Angeles-based organization, put Nebraska two spots higher than in 2007.

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