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## Report: Bad roads cost SC drivers \$5.4B a year

FRONT PAGE

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Poor roads and bridges are costing South Carolinians \$5.4 billion a year, according to a report released Tuesday by a Washington, D.C.-based transportation research group.

TRIP states nearly two-thirds of the state's major locally and state-maintained urban roads and highways are in poor condition, while 35 percent are rated mediocre. Nineteen percent are in fair condition, and the remaining 17 percent are rated in good condition.

The report also notes 10 percent of the state's bridges are structurally deficient, meaning there is significant deterioration of the bridge deck, supports or other major components.

Crashes in South Carolina claimed 4,406 lives between 2012 and 2016, and the overall traffic fatality rate of 1.89 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel is the highest in the nation, the report states.

The report estimated costs to drivers for vehicle operation, congestion-related delays and traffic crashes for five regions in South Carolina. The Charleston region was the most costly, at \$1.85 billion, followed by Myrtle Beach, \$1.79 billion; Columbia, \$1.72 billion; Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson, \$1.38 billion; and Florence, \$1.28 billion.

The cost per driver is as high as \$1,850 in some urban areas, the report states.

"These conditions are only going to get worse, increasing the additional costs to motorists, if greater investment is not made available at the state and local levels of government," TRIP's executive director Will Wilkins stated.

AAA Carolinas CEO Dave Parsons urged lawmakers to support a gas tax increase for infrastructure upgrades that "boost safety, improve congestion and support long-term growth for South Carolina."

Last week, the state Senate Finance Committee approved a House roads bill, which now heads to the full Senate for debate. The House bill raises the gas tax by 10 cents over five years, while its companion in the Senate raises the gas tax

by 12 cents over three years. The current tax rate is 16.75 cents per gallon.

S.C. Transportation Secretary Christy Hall has estimated roughly \$28 billion over the next 25 years is needed to bring the state's highway system up to good condition. In 2013 and again last year, the Legislature approved borrowing roughly \$5 billion over the next 10 years for highway construction.

In response to the TRIP report, Gov. Henry McMaster again stated his opposition to a gas tax.

"Fixing South Carolina roads is one of the governor's top priorities, but he thinks that the revenue generated by the current gas tax needs to be directed to improving roads and bridges before raising taxes on the people of the state is even considered," spokesman Brian Symmes said.

Republican state Sen. Scott Talley of Spartanburg, said Tuesday's report illustrates why lawmakers need to do more.

"The General Assembly must address the roads issue," Talley said. "There are two main components to this issue — sustainable funding and reform to provide accountability for dollars spent on roads in our state. As much as possible, we need to get politics out of road funding. I am hopeful the Senate will take up the roads bill very soon so we can have meaningful debate."

The citizens group Americans for Prosperity-South Carolina has opposed any legislation that raises the gas tax but does not reform the state Department of Transportation.

"A series of tax and fee increases on our roads, vehicles and gasoline won't solve the problem alone," the group's state director, Daniel Brennan, recently stated. "South Carolina needs a DOT that is accountable to the citizens as a true cabinet agency."

Another statewide advocacy group, S.C. Alliance to Fix Our Roads, supports a gas tax increase.

"South Carolina drivers cannot wait another year for a plan to fix our crumbling roads," SCFOR President Bill Ross recently stated.

In response to the report, SCDOT spokesman Pete Poore Hall said, "SCDOT

The newspaper page features several articles. At the top, there are two small news items: 'GAMECOCKS THE TOAST OF THE STATE' and 'NEWTON TO HAVE SHOULDER SURGERY'. The main headline is 'Trump to GOP: Pass bill', with a sub-headline 'CONGRESS HEALTH CARE OVERHAUL'. Below this is another article 'DHEC to review permits for pipeline' with a sub-headline 'DOMINION PROJECT'. A map shows the pipeline route through South Carolina. Other articles include 'Severe storms move through Upstate' and 'Disturbing schools' legislate'. A sidebar on the right contains a 'REGION AFFECTED' box with the text 'Report: Bad roads cost SC drivers \$5.4B a year' and a 'RELATED STORY' box with the text 'Gas tax showdown looms, A&Z'.

has reviewed the data in the 2017 TRIP Report ... SCDOT believes the information speaks for itself."

Also responding to the report, S.C. Chamber of Commerce President Ted Pitts stated, "This is the year to finish the job on roads. The business community has long known the cost of losing when it comes to efforts to invest in our roads and bridges."

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