

Chattanooga Times Free Press



FRONT PAGE

Cost of driving in Chattanooga

Report: City drivers lose \$1,500 a year due to insufficient roads

By the numbers

- 4,965: People who were killed in Tennessee traffic crashes from 2012 to 2016
65: People who were killed in Chattanooga traffic crashes for each of the last three years.
33 percent: Locally and state-maintained roads are "poor" or "mediocre"
28 hours: The average Chattanooga's time lost per year due to traffic congestion
Source: TRIP

Additional cost to drivers by city

CHATTANOOGA

Vehicle operating costs: \$387
Lack of adequate roadway safety features: \$354
Congestion: \$730
Total: \$1,471

KNOXVILLE

Vehicle operating costs: \$172
Lack of adequate roadway safety features: \$355
Congestion: \$849
Total: \$1,376

MEMPHIS

Vehicle operating costs: \$589
Lack of adequate roadway safety features: \$350
Congestion: \$1,080
Total: \$2,019

NASHVILLE

Vehicle operating costs: \$192
Lack of adequate roadway safety features: \$307
Congestion: \$1,168
Total: \$1,667
Source: TRIP

Chattanooga has seen about 65 people killed in traffic crashes for each of the last three years, double the number killed in homicides in 2016. The state as a whole has an average of 993 traffic fatalities each year.

Addressing some of the most pressing issues could reduce the toll on human life, said Rocky Moretti, director of policy and research for TRIP.

"In about a third of fatal or serious traffic crashes, the lack of adequate roadway safety features are a contributing factor," Moretti said. "Rumble strips, guard rails, turn lanes at busy intersections — when those safety features are provided, we see a significant improvement in safety."

Milani and the authors of the report say both the cost of human life and the price tag faced by drivers should compel lawmakers to tackle the problem head on this legislative session by investing to save lives and money in the long term.

"We are urging the state and the legislators to take action on transportation funding," Milani said. "We do support Gov. [Bill] Haslam's IMPROVE bill, and we think that that can be a meaningful and sustainable transportation funding plan."

Haslam's plan seeks to raise gas taxes by 6 cents per gallon and diesel by 10 cents over a three-year period while also increasing vehicle registration fees and several other fees to raise \$350 million he says is needed to address a backlog of \$10.5 billion of infrastructure projects.

Some say the proposed gas tax is unnecessary and would actually harm Tennessee residents. Americans For Prosperity has released a string of ads decrying the legislation.

"It's odd to see Governor Haslam depending on at least 20 Democrats to vote in favor of a tax hike that will harm their constituents the most," Andy Ogles, Tennessee's Americans For Prosperity state director, wrote in a news release. "Even with a full one percent cut to the grocery tax most families, especially those with fixed or lower incomes, will lose in this tax swap."

"There are options to fund infrastructure without raising taxes or fees by one cent. Given the state has a two-billion-dollar surplus, we should be cutting taxes, not raising them. It's time for the legislature to listen to their constituents, not those seeking to profit off raising taxes on hardworking families."

The rate at which roadways are deteriorating across the nation has also accelerated as more and more drivers contribute to their wear and tear. The report shows that is a double-edged sword because while the cost of repairs is ballooning, the economy is barreling ahead.

"One of the most critical findings of the report is that vehicle travel is growing very rapidly here in Tennessee. That's a positive — it reflects economic growth," Moretti said. "We estimate that by 2030 there will be a 20 percent increase in vehicle travel across the state."

The report found that 33 percent of major locally- and state-maintained roads in the Chattanooga urban area are in poor or mediocre condition,

Front page of the newspaper featuring the main article 'Cost of driving in Chattanooga' with a photo of a road, and other news items like 'Woodmore bus crash' and 'Haslam signs he will sign bus seat belt bill'.

BY EMMETT GIENAPP, STAFF WRITER

Deteriorating roads and bridges cost the average driver in Chattanooga nearly \$1,500 a year, according to a new report, which warns the situation is only going to worsen without immediate investment.

The report released Tuesday by TRIP, a national transportation research group based in Washington, D.C., says Tennesseans lose \$6 billion a year because of vehicle damage from decaying roads, traffic crashes and congestion-related delays.

A daunting backlog of infrastructure projects on state and local levels could present major safety concerns as existing roadways struggle to accommodate increasing use and abuse by drivers. Travel on Tennessee roadways surged 9 percent from 2013 to 2016.

Drivers in Knoxville, Memphis and Nashville lose \$1,376, \$2,019 and \$1,667 respectively every year.

"Roadways are really the foundation for traffic safety," said Stephanie Milani, Tennessee public relations director for AAA. "If you do not have adequate roads and traffic safety measures on those roads, you can see greater crash risks, and then also that reduces our mobility."

costing the average driver \$387 annually in extra repairs, accelerated car depreciation and higher fuel consumption.

Chattanooga also spend about 28 hours a year in traffic, costing drivers an average of \$730 every year in lost time and wasted fuel.

About \$619 billion in goods are shipped across Tennessee, and 75 percent of those goods are shipped by large trucks, which put the most stress on roadways. The economic activity is a boon to the state, but legislators will need to think ahead if roads are going to survive continued growth, according to the report.

"The condition of Tennessee's transportation system will worsen in the future without additional funding, leading to even higher costs for drivers," Will Wilkins, TRIP's executive director, wrote in a news release. "In order to promote economic growth, foster quality of life and get drivers safely and efficiently to their destination, Tennessee will need to make transportation funding a top priority."

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