

# THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

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## Study says sub-par roads cost Memphis motorists dearly

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*(Photo: The Commercial Appeal staff)*

Sub-par road conditions cost Memphis motorists \$2,019 a year each on average, including \$589 in added vehicle operating costs for driving on poor and mediocre roads, a new study says.

National transportation research group TRIP (The Road Information Program) said 51 percent of Memphis' major locally and state-maintained roads were sub-par. That was a slight improvement from 52 percent a year ago.

Memphis Public Works director Robert Knecht called the TRIP report a “pessimistic” assessment of the city’s road conditions. His rough estimate was that a fourth of the city’s streets might be considered substandard.

TRIP and the Transportation Coalition of Tennessee released the findings of statewide research Tuesday, on the eve of an anticipated General Assembly vote on a transportation funding bill.

A news conference at the Greater Memphis Chamber office Downtown came as chamber president Phil Trenary urged constituents to contact legislators to support Gov.

Bill Haslam's proposed IMPROVE Act, which would increase fuel taxes while reducing other taxes.

"Certainly money is the issue," said Dexter Muller, a former city and chamber official who represents the Transportation Coalition of Tennessee. "It's not where would the roads go. The roads are already planned."

TRIP said repair bills, poorer fuel economy, tire wear and accelerated depreciation are among expenses associated with driving on sub-standard roads. Other costs of road-related deficiencies in Memphis included \$1,080 a year in lost time and fuel due to traffic congestion and \$350 a year for traffic crashes in which inadequate road safety features were likely a contributing factor.

Congestion-related delays totaled 43 hours on average, and the Memphis urban area averaged 122 traffic fatalities a year over three years, TRIP said.

Knecht said Memphis, with 6,800 miles of street lanes, has "a much larger inventory of streets than any other municipality in the state by far. That presents different challenges, but we are spending more, the mayor’s committed to increasing funding towards paving. We increased it last year. I foresee an increase again this year, depending on how that goes through council."

"We’re doing what we need to do," Knecht said. "We’re looking for the state to fill in the gap with the IMPROVE Act."

Statewide, TRIP said, deteriorated roads and bridges, congestion and lack of desirable safety features cost motorists \$6 billion a year.

Memphis had the highest costs among the four largest metropolitan areas, ahead of Nashville, \$1,667, Chattanooga, \$1,471, and Knoxville, \$1,376.

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