

# THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

THURSDAY, APRIL 20, 2017

## Weathersbee: Memphis' crumbling roads drive business away

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If the pockmarked streets haven't made it clear by now, a recent transportation report should: Memphis' roads are rough on cars.

They're so sub-par, in fact, that the national transportation research group, also known as TRIP, found that Memphians spend around \$2,019 a year to fix their cars because of them.

Not unexpectedly, TRIP's findings have lent some ammunition to supporters of Gov. Bill Haslam's IMPROVE Act, which would, among other things, boost the gasoline tax by 7 cents per gallon, and 12 cents per gallon on diesel, and cut the sales tax on groceries from 5 percent to 4.5 percent.

The proceeds would be used for much-needed repairs to the state's roads, which, according to Haslam, now face a \$10 billion backlog. On top of that, some \$525 million would be

used to fix Memphis' roads.

Yet this city's crumbling roads aren't just a problem for motorists who want to arrive at their destinations with their alignments unscathed, or who want to save money on repairs.

They also are a problem when it comes to persuading jobs and businesses to come here, said Phil Trenary, president and CEO of Greater Memphis Chamber.

"We know that we have lost businesses, hundreds if not thousands of jobs, out of our industrial area, specifically Lamar Avenue, because of the conditions of the roads," Trenary said.

No doubt, deteriorating roads can stifle economic progress.

In 2016, TRIP found that the traffic congestion spawned by deteriorating roads and lack of highway modernization were causing increasing delays in Tennessee for shippers and manufacturers, which in turn pass costs on to consumers.

"Businesses rely on an efficient and dependable transportation system to move products and services," the report stated. "A key component in business efficiency and success is the level and ease of access to customers, markets, materials and workers..."

"Increasing levels of congestion add significant costs to consumers, transportation companies, manufacturers, distributors and wholesalers and can reduce the attractiveness of a location to a company to consider expansion or even to locate a new facility."

Sure, it's easy to recoil at paying an extra 7 cents or 12 cents a gallon for gas – especially after being used to paying less than \$3 a gallon.

But saving those few cents won't mean much if companies that can bring jobs to pay people more than enough to afford the tax – and then some – won't come here because the roads are so dilapidated.

Not to mention that, if the raggedy roads and highways continue to keep vehicles in the shop, it will be tougher for many people to get to the jobs they already have.