

Study Highlights What Poor Roads Cost Tennessee Drivers

By: Chase Arnold



MEMPHIS, TENN (localmemphis.com) - Poor and deficient roadways and bridges can affect everything from the amount of money needed to upkeep your car to how long you're stuck in traffic on a daily basis. A new report from TRIP, a national transportation research group out of Washington D.C., puts a dollar amount on those travel impacts for Tennessee drivers. That report shows Memphis drivers are paying a higher price because of poor roads more than anyone else in the state.

According to the report, Memphis drivers lose about two thousand dollars a year due to poor roadways, easily the highest in the state. And it all starts with the roads themselves.

"On top of the congestion levels, you've also got the deteriorating pavement here in the Memphis area," says Carolyn Kelly, the author of the TRIP study. "What that leads to is additional costs for vehicle repairs and accelerated depreciation."

The report claims half of Memphis' roads are considered "poor" or "mediocre" quality. Compare that to the next highest city, Chattanooga, where about 35% of roads are the same grade. Researchers say those poor quality roads certainly contributed to Memphis having the highest fatality rate for drivers in the state between 2013 and 2015.

"Many [deaths] could have been prevented had there been additional safety features present on the roadway. Things like left hand turn lanes, median barriers, rumble strips, or even additional shoulders on the roadway to make the roads a bit more forgiving," says Kelly.

Adding to the high cost of driving, Memphis drivers spend about 43 hours a year in traffic, which costs drivers about a thousand dollars a year. The only city with worse traffic is Nashville. Drivers there lose about 45 hours a year.

TRIP also discovered 5% of Memphis' bridges are structurally deficient. That's 65 bridges that are still safe to drive on, but need repairs. That number ranks last in the state.

Kelly says the TRIP study is only looking to provide information that will help local and state lawmakers come up with a plan to improve roads. The biggest challenge now that the study is out is finding the money to make improvements happen.

Tennesseans lose six billion dollars every year due to poor roadways and bridges, according to the study. The state of Tennessee doesn't have six billion dollars lying around to fix the problem.

"Money is the issue. It's not where would the roads go. They've already been planned. Most of the roadways that are on our major road plan are sitting there unfunded," says Dexter Muller with the Tennessee Infrastructure Alliance.

Kelly admits money is a challenge they do not account for in the TRIP study. They are trying to point out problems, not solutions.

"What we want to recognize is that those deficiencies are not at all a reflection of the abilities of the DOT or municipalities or counties," says Kelly. "In fact, they're doing a tremendous job with the funds they have available."

There has been plenty of talk about ways to raise money, such as the gas tax, but the Tennessee Infrastructure Alliance says governor Bill Haslam is trying to do more than that.

"It's not just a proposal to raise the gas tax. There's a lot of other features to it that have to do with bringing more companies to the state," says Mullen.

The TRIP study says that for every dollar invested in road improvement, the benefit for drivers would be about five dollars. Muller says improved roads will be especially crucial for Memphis' economy as a travel hub because water and air travel are dependent on having good roads.

[To view the entire TRIP study, click here.](#)