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## Bad roads are ‘beating up your car’ — and costing SLO County drivers \$1,400 per year, study says

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Drivers in the San Luis Obispo, Santa Maria and Santa Barbara region are spending an average of \$1,419 a year on costs related to poor road conditions, according to a [TRIP transportation study](#).

Despite the four-figure average cost, the region pays the least out of California metropolitan areas, the study says. Los Angeles and San Francisco and Oakland drivers pay the highest dollar amount, with averages of \$2,995 and \$2,992, respectively.

In total, road conditions cost Californians an average of \$61 billion a year.

TRIP, a nonprofit transportation research group based in Washington D.C., used information from the Federal Highway Administration, Bureau of Transportation statistics and a number of other transportation data analysts.

The study analyzed congestion, safety and road quality to provide average costs that drivers spend as a result of the three factors.

“(The total is) essentially the costs of rough roads beating up your car,” TRIP Associate Director of Research and Communications Carolyn Bonifas said.

“Poor” road conditions are the leading cause of high costs — with San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara drivers spending an average of \$655 annually due to accelerated vehicle depreciation, increased fuel consumption, tire wear and other vehicle repairs. Statewide, poor road conditions contribute to \$22.1 billion in vehicle operating costs.

Of all major roads and highways in the San Luis Obispo-Santa Barbara area, 58 percent are in poor or mediocre condition, with only 23 percent of the roads considered in good condition and 19 percent in fair condition.

The study also notes that 42 of 811 bridges longer than 20 feet in the region are structurally deficient or deteriorating. Road deterioration is often a result of traffic, moisture and climate.

The study reports that for every \$1 spent on road maintenance, taxpayers save up to \$10 down the road when conditions make the road unusable.

Caltrans also tracks the quality of road conditions, however they only track state highways and categorize them in good, fair or

poor condition, whereas TRIP used four categories and tracked highways and major roads, Caltrans public information officer Jim Shivers said.



Plans call for an interchange at the Cholame “Y” linking Highways 46 and 41. The project is depending on money from the SB 1 gas tax.

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According to Shivers, Caltrans reports 40.8 percent of state highways in California are in good condition, compared to the mere 19 percent of major roads and highways that TRIP categorized in good condition throughout the state.

Shivers said only 5.7 percent of the state highways are in poor condition, according to Caltrans, whereas the TRIP study said 44 percent of California’s major roads and highways are in poor condition and 24 percent are in mediocre condition (which is not a category Caltrans uses in their report).

However, Shivers said they agree with TRIP that it is important to fix roads sooner rather than later to save money.

“This study illustrates what years of backlogged maintenance have done to California’s roadways and calls out inadequate transportation funding as being a major cause of the condition of California’s major roads and highways,” Shivers wrote in an email to The Tribune.

The study also factors in traffic safety. From 2014-2016, an average of 63 people were killed in car crashes within the region. Roadway features, such as number of lanes, lane width, lighting, markers, intersection design and barriers are estimated to contribute to one-third of fatal crashes.

Drivers in the area spend an average of \$395 a year on traffic collisions, of which roadway features are a potential contributing factor.

The last factor addressed in the study was road congestion, stating that drivers in the

area waste an annual average of \$368 in the form of time and fuel, with an average of drivers spending 16 hours per year stuck in traffic.

Although Bonifas said TRIP does not take a stance on propositions, the study results come months before voters decide whether to uphold Senate Bill-1, the Road Repair Accountability Act, which was enacted in April 2017.

“Part of our mission as an organization is to inform drivers, consumer and decision makers,” Bonifas said.

The act imposes a 12 cent gas tax per gallon. The money goes toward maintaining and upgrading roadways, however this November, if voted into action, Proposition 6 will eliminate the tax and repair act.

According to Shivers, funding from SB-1 led to the resurfacing of local areas including Highway 101 from Templeton to Paso Robles, State Route 1 in Lompoc and Highway 101 in Buellton.

“This report highlighted the need for the state to maintain the current level of funding in order to maintain roadway safety. This is what SB-1 allows Caltrans and transportation agencies to do,” Shivers wrote.

“The report points out that better roads not only save drivers money on car repairs — it also helps reduce traffic incidents, injuries and deaths,” he added.

Critics of SB-1 say the tax overburdens motorists and allows lawmakers to divert funds to other non-transportation projects.



Traffic moves on Los Osos Valley Road between Calle Joaquin and the Highway 101 overpass. A study finds that San Luis Obispo-area drivers spend an average of 16 hours in traffic per year. David Middlecamp [dmiddlecamp@thetribunenews.com](mailto:dmiddlecamp@thetribunenews.com)