

## Bad roads cost Colorado Springs drivers nearly \$2,000 annually, TRIP report says

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As state transportation officials grapple with an annual budget shortfall of about \$1 billion, a research group has put a price tag on what clogged highways and poorly maintained roads cost area drivers. Gazette file photo

Expenses associated with vehicle maintenance, crashes and traffic-related delays cost a Colorado Springs area driver an average of \$1,940 per year, says a study released Thursday by national transportation research group TRIP.

That number is about \$2,306 a year for a Denver area driver. And statewide, drivers are losing about \$7.1 billion annually to Colorado's ailing transportation system.

The TRIP report is based on data from a variety of sources, including the Federal Highway Administration and AAA.

The figure for Colorado Springs has decreased slightly, from an average of \$1,954 per driver per year, as TRIP measured in a similar report in 2017. But statewide, the total has inched upward from \$6.8 billion annually.

Other highlights from the study:

- About 37 percent of major urban roads and highways in Colorado Springs, and about 20 percent statewide, are in "poor condition."
- 33 of the 690 bridges in the Colorado Springs area were rated structurally deficient — "meaning there is a significant deterioration of the bridge deck, supports or other major components."
- Each Colorado Springs area driver loses an estimated 37 hours a year to congestion, and each Denver area driver loses about 52 hours annually. The lost time averages a cost of \$850 a year for Colorado Springs area drivers and \$1,190 a year for Denver area drivers.

- Colorado Springs area drivers spend an average of \$702 per year on maintenance-related costs, such as repairs and increases in fuel consumption and tire wear due to deteriorated roads.

TRIP is a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit whose sponsors include insurance companies, equipment manufacturers and businesses involved in the construction and engineering of road projects, according to the report.

Colorado Transportation Commissioner Rocky Scott, whose district includes El Paso County, said he was not surprised by the figures.

"We've been underinvesting for so many years," Scott said.

"The effects catch up with you."

Unless legislators provide more money for transportation in the state budget, or Colorado generates revenue from a tax or bond issue, road conditions won't improve, Scott said.

"We need to sacrifice somewhere," he said.

The November ballot might ask voters two questions that would pump more money into transportation projects across the state.

One ballot measure, proposed by the Libertarian-leaning Independence Institute, would allow the state to issue up to \$3.5 billion in bonds, with a maximum repayment cost of \$5.2 billion over 20 years, to make road and bridge improvements across the state. The debt would be repaid by tightening the belts of other state departments by about \$260 million a year.

Another measure, pushed by the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce, would authorize a 0.62 percent sales tax increase from 2019 through 2039 and allow the state to issue up to \$6 billion in bonds, with a total repayment cost of no more than \$9.4 billion over the next 20 years. Some of the tax revenue would go toward bond repayment, and some would go to state, municipal and county transportation projects, including multimodal initiatives.

The two groups are petitioning to get the initiatives on the ballot, and those petitions are due in August, according to the Colorado Secretary of State's Office.

El Paso County commissioner Mark Waller, vice chairman of the Pikes Peak Regional Transportation Authority, said the solution isn't a new revenue source. Legislators just need to trim other areas of the budget, he said.

"It's a prioritization issue," he said. "I think that the dollars are there in the budget to overcome this issue. It's just that the Legislature has decided to prioritize those dollars in other ways, and that causes the problem."

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