Report: Drivers pay price for bad roads

Typical Cincinnati-area motorist sees $2K hit over poor conditions

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Nearly one third of Ohio’s roads are in poor or mediocre condition, and one group estimates they cost the average Cincinnati-area driver more than $2,000 annually and drivers statewide $12 billion, according to a new report.

Rocky Moretti, TRIP’s director of policy and research, stressed the need for more funding for vehicle maintenance during a news conference Thursday.

“Where appropriate, highway improvements can reduce traffic fatalities and crashes while improving traffic flow to help relieve congestion,” Moretti said.

“Such improvements include removing or shielding obstacles; adding or improving medians; improved lighting; adding rumble strips, wider lanes, wider and paved shoulders; upgrading roads from two lanes to four lanes; and better road markings and traffic signals.”

According to the report, 23 percent of Ohio’s major locally and state-owned roads are in poor or mediocre condition. Additionally, seven percent of Ohio’s locally- and state-owned bridges are structurally deficient.

“Rural roads see more fatal crashes than urban roads, according to the report. The fatality rate on Ohio’s non-interstate rural roads in 2016 was about two-and-a-half times that on all other roads.

Costs for drivers

The report found that badly maintained roads cost Cincinnati-area drivers an average of $2,022 per year. The costs stem from repairing damaged vehicles ($391), loss of time and fuel from waiting in traffic ($1,057) and depreciation of vehicle values ($574).

TRIP estimates that the average motorist in the Middletown area spends an additional $672 annually in extra vehicle operating costs/depreciation of vehicle values.

While there is no similar data available for the urban areas of Hamilton or Fairfield, the average economic cost of fatal and serious traffic crashes in which a lack of adequate safety features were a contributing factor per motorist in Butler County is $377, Moretti said.

There was an average of 27 fatalities in traffic crashes in Butler County from 2014 to 2016, he said. The TRIP report measured costs to drivers by analyzing the impact of decreased vehicle value, traffic crashes and wasted gas and time due to congestion. In the Cincinnati area, vehicle depreciation and congestion had the greatest impact.

Vehicle depreciation cost the average driver $574 per year, safety issues cost $391, and congestion cost $1,057.

The Cincinnati area had the second lowest cost to drivers out of Ohio’s largest urban areas. Drivers in the Cleveland/Akron area paid the highest cost at about $2,180 per year.

The average driver in the Cincinnati area spends 44 hours per year — more than one full working week — stuck in traffic. That’s also the most time of any major metro area stuck in traffic. Dayton drivers, in contrast, lost an average of 27 hours a year.

There is no congestion estimate for the Middletown area, Moretti said.

Projects in need of funding

The report identified 21 needed transportation projects in major urban areas that lack adequate funding for construction to proceed, including a project to improve Brent Spence Bridge approach work along Interstate 75 and the Ohio share of main span.

Other improvement projects lacking adequate funding include widening I-75 in some portions of the Greater Cincinnati area, improvements to the Western Hills Viaduct, and improvements to the Eastern Corridor, including widening, new interchanges and improvements to ramps and overpasses, Moretti said.

“It is critical that Ohio have adequate funding to proceed with these needed projects and to further improve the condition, reliability and safety of its transportation system,” he said.

According to the report, every $1 in deferred maintenance on roads and bridges costs an additional $4 to $5 in future repairs.

Pavement deterioration also accelerates with time, and older roads cost drivers more money in vehicle repairs.

Funding is decreasing

The use of roads in Ohio has increased by 20 percent since 1993. By 2040, miles travelled are projected to increase another 20 percent.

“Ohio’s investment in its roads and bridges are increasingly deteriorated and congested, hampering economic growth, safety and quality of life.”

The efficiency and condition of Ohio’s transportation system, particularly its highways, is critical to the health of the state’s economy, Moretti said.

Annually, $1.1 trillion in goods are shipped to and from sites in Ohio, relying heavily on the state’s network of roads and bridges. And approximately 2.4 million full-time jobs in Ohio in key industries like tourism, retail sales, agriculture and manufacturing are dependent on the state’s transportation infrastructure network, he said.

“Conditions are only going to get worse, increasing the additional costs to motorists, if greater investment is not made available at the state and local levels of government,” said Will Wilkins, TRIP’s executive director. “Without adequate funding, Ohio’s transportation system will become increasingly deteriorated and congested, hampering economic growth, safety and quality of life.”