

Toledo officials call on lawmakers to invest in infrastructure



By [David Patch](#) | BLADE STAFF WRITER



Citing a trade organization's estimate that deficient or unsafe roadways cost Toledoans thousands of dollars per year in lost time and vehicle repairs, city and Lucas County officials called Thursday on Columbus and Washington to reverse years of neglected upkeep and improvements.

Reports like the one issued by The Road Information Project help "to demonstrate to federal and state legislators the unmet need," said Mike Pniewski, a deputy Lucas County engineer, during a news conference at the Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments offices at Central Union Terminal.

"Roads are the lifeline of the economic [and] industrial structure of northwest Ohio" — more so than other forms of transportation or the Internet, said Pete Gerken, a Lucas County commissioner.

And Toledo Mayor Wade Kapszukiewicz laid specific blame on state legislation passed starting in 2011, shortly after Gov. John Kasich took office, that phased out Ohio's personal-property tax and cut state aid to cities — to the tune of \$15 million annually for Toledo.

"We are doing our best to make up the gap," the mayor said. "But it cannot be ignored that there are tens of millions of dollars that used to go to things like resurfacing residential roads that just aren't there any more. ... We live in a state that has made a conscious

decision to not invest in its transportation network the way it should."

Mr. Gerken said Lucas County was "doing our part to close that gap" when it recently raised the county-option vehicle registration fee by \$5, but Mr. Pniewski said making up the entire \$5 million shortfall in the county engineer's desired budget would require four times as much.

Citing state and federal data, TRIP's "Modernizing Ohio's Transportation System: Progress and Challenges in Providing Safe, Efficient and Well-Maintained Roads, Highways and Bridges" report calculated that overall, Ohioans lose \$12 billion annually to costs associated with roadways and bridges that are inadequately maintained, congested, or design-deficient.

In Toledo, the report said, the average driver's annual costs include \$468 in extra vehicle maintenance and tire wear, \$983 in lost time and fuel waste from congestion, and \$525 in safety-related losses.

The safety factor is based in part on research indicating that roadway design or condition contributes to one-third of all traffic crashes, according to the report.

TRIP also noted that \$1.38 billion in Ohio Turnpike bond proceeds were provided starting in 2014 to the Ohio Department of Transportation for off-Turnpike projects.

While that funding has boosted several major projects in Toledo and elsewhere in northern Ohio, its imminent exhaustion will leave the state short once again for future road improvements, such as the so-far unfunded widening of I-475/U.S. 23 between Airport Highway and U.S. 24 and realignment of State Rt. 66 around Archbold.

"This is a drop in state funding at a time when growth and economic development demand increased investment," Rocky Moretti, TRIP's director of policy and research, said during the Toledo news conference. Contact David Patch at: dpatch@theblade.com or 419-724-6094.