

# THE CAP TIMES

Madison, Wisconsin

**EDITORIAL** - Friday, October 5, 2018

## Plain Talk: Crumbling roads mean money down the drain for taxpayers

[By Dave Zweifel](#)

If a new report by TRIP, a national transportation research group out of Washington, is accurate, we might just be a lot better off to pay several more cents in taxes on a gallon of gasoline.

The organization estimated last month that deteriorated state roads and bridges are costing Wisconsin motorists a total of \$6.8 billion annually — \$2,139 per driver in the Madison urban area.

The impact of road congestion and a lack of modern safety features has resulted in higher vehicle operating costs, more traffic accidents and longer delays sitting, for example, on Madison's Beltline.

A larger investment in transportation improvements at the local, state and federal levels

could relieve some of that congestion, improve safety and help support economic growth, the report added.

The TRIP study found that 75 percent of major locally and state-maintained roads in the Madison area are in poor or mediocre condition, with that alone costing drivers \$910 each year in extra operating costs, accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs and increased fuel consumption and tire wear.

It also estimated that traffic congestion in Madison alone is gradually worsening — something I think we already knew — and is causing 38 hours of delay for the average motorist and a corresponding amount of wasted fuel.

This isn't the first study that has found Wisconsin ranks among the worst states in the country on the condition of its roads and highways.

Yet Gov. Scott Walker won't budge on alleviating the problems by increasing funding for road maintenance. He says he'd be willing to increase the state gas tax to help bring in more revenue, but with the caveat that legislators would need to find a corresponding cut in revenue. Since that would mean cuts in social programs or funds for education, his stubbornness means nothing gets done while road and highway maintenance continues to fall further behind.

Walker insists that he has increased funding on transportation during his terms as governor, but that claim flies in the face of a report from his own Department of Transportation that showed state funding under Walker has decreased across every major road program.

"The current funding system causes us to be reactive, responding from one crisis to the next," complained Dan Fedderly, executive director of the Wisconsin County Highways Association.

An example of just that is the recommendation from the Walker administration to delay reconstruction of the I-90-39 intersection with the Madison Beltline, meaning that it will remain at two lanes traveling north while the rest of the highway will be three lanes in each direction, a condition that highway experts insist will cause a massive bottleneck during peak travel times.

While Walker contends he is saving Wisconsin taxpayers big money by holding the line on the state's already paltry gasoline tax, his stubbornness is costing all those taxpayers big money instead.

*Dave Zweifel is editor emeritus of The Capital Times. [dzweifel@madison.com](mailto:dzweifel@madison.com) and on Twitter @DaveZweifel.*

