



Bad roads cause \$18 billion in damage, waste in Illinois



Craig Scroggins deposits a shovel-full of cold mix asphalt into a deep narrow pothole along Chatham Road in Springfield on Feb. 20, 2014. [David Spencer/The State Journal Register]

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It's not only frustrating for motorists to drive on Illinois' crumbling, congested roads, it's costly, too.

It's costing Illinois motorists more than \$18 billion a year in damaged vehicles and wasted time to maneuver on those roads according to a study conducted by TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based transportation research group.

The group released its findings Wednesday at a Statehouse news conference, part of an ongoing effort by various interest groups to press for a new capital bill for Illinois.

"We think this TRIP report shows that doing nothing is actually much more expensive than coming up with a solution together," said Whitney Barnes of the Illinois Chamber of Commerce.

The chamber supports a 25-cents-per-gallon increase in the state gasoline tax to pay for transportation projects. As part of that, the chamber wants the state to stop applying the sales tax to gasoline sales which would save motorists money but create an estimated \$600 million hole in the state budget.

The TRIP study said the total cost of the state's overcrowded and deteriorating road system to motorists is \$18.3 billion a year. Of the six larger metropolitan areas examined by the study, Springfield ranked last in those costs. Even so, TRIP determined that Springfield motorists are paying \$1,294 in vehicle operating costs from driving on roads in need of repair, wasting time and fuel sitting in traffic because of congestion and from damage caused by crashes in which road conditions were a contributing factor.

The study determined that 45 percent of roads in the Springfield area are in poor or mediocre condition and 5 percent of bridges are in poor or structurally deficient condition.

"The potholes in suburban Cook County look like lunar landscapes," said state Sen. Martin Sandoval, D-Chicago, who's been working on a capital bill. "We fail to look at our transportation infrastructure and treat it as a vital utility in our lives."

"The real question we have to ask is what is the cost if we do nothing," said Sen. Donald DeWitte, R-St. Charles, the Republican negotiator on the bill.

The various ideas floated to pay for transportation projects all include an increase in the 19-cents a gallon gasoline tax that hasn't been increased since 1990. Increases in various vehicle fees, like license plates, are also included.

Although details of a capital bill have yet to be made public, interest groups continue to mount a public relations campaign to convince lawmakers and the public to support a building program and tax increases needed to pay for it. Transportation interests have held several news conferences to publicize their case and more recently, proponents of so-called vertical building projects have been doing the same. So far, universities and K-12 schools have held news conferences and hospitals are scheduled to hold a news conference Thursday.

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