

Report: Michigan doesn't have money to fix deteriorating roads

Kristi Tanner, Detroit Free Press



Where do potholes come from? According to the Michigan Department of Transportation, it all starts with melting snow and ice. Detroit Free Press

Michigan lacks the funds to address a deteriorating transportation system putting safety, economic growth and quality of life on the back burner, according to a report being released Tuesday by a nonprofit research group.

The report published by TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based transportation group, examined [legislation](#) that will help increase state transportation funding from \$2.2 billion in 2015 to almost \$3.7 billion by 2023 and found that despite the increase, many crucial transportation projects remain unfunded.

In Michigan, TRIP estimates the bad roads are costing drivers \$4.6 billion a year. That's \$646 per driver.

"The TRIP data substantiates what bipartisan and nonpartisan experts have been saying, and underscores why Gov. Whitmer's budget aggressively addresses this problem," said Jeff Cranson, spokesman for the Michigan Department of Transportation. "Decades of underinvestment have taken a toll on Michigan roads, and the longer we wait, the more it will cost to recover. Neighboring states that already invest more than Michigan are raising their fuel taxes to maintain their roads.

Last week, Whitmer proposed a [45-cent-per-gallon increase on Michigan's gas tax by Oct. 1, 2020](#), which would raise more than \$2 billion annually to fix Michigan's roads and bridges.

TRIP is a private nonprofit that promotes transportation policies that help relieve traffic congestion, improve environmental conditions and economic productivity. TRIP is sponsored by insurance companies, equipment manufacturers, construction, labor unions and other organizations.

Some of the TRIP report findings presented at the Detroit Regional Chamber on Tuesday include:

- The additional cost to motorists for driving on Michigan roads in poor, mediocre or fair

conditions is about \$14.1 billion each year for items like vehicle wear and tear, insurance, lost time and wasted gas.

- Among urban areas examined by TRIP, motorists in Detroit had the highest additional costs per driver at \$2,544 due to driving on poor roads.
- The percentage of federal-aid eligible roads and highways in Michigan with pavement in poor condition increased from 25 percent in 2006 to 40 percent in 2017, according to the [Michigan Transportation Asset Management Council \(TAMC\)](#).
- Statewide, 11 percent of bridges were structurally deficient, meaning at least one of the major elements of the bridge was in poor condition or worse in 2017. Nationwide, that figure was 9 percent in the same year, according to Free Press research.
- About 43 percent of bridges in Michigan, 4,815 structures, were built in 1969 or earlier.
- Michigan's traffic fatality rate of 1.01 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled was below the national rate of 1.16 in 2017.



Work crews close all but one lane on I-75 north of Big Beaver to patch pot holes that shredded tires on Tuesday, Jan. 22, 2019. (Photo: Mandi Wright, Detroit Free Press)

The findings on Michigan bridges are consistent with a Free Press analysis of November 2018 MDOT data, which found 11 percent of bridges more than 20 feet in length on public roads were in poor or worse condition — a total of 1,236 structures. Among counties with at least 100 bridges, the highest rates of bridges in poor condition or worse — at least one in five — could be found in Branch, Saginaw and Ingham counties last year.

In terms of cost, it is not just structurally deficient bridges but age, "all of these older bridges where the bill to replace is coming due at some point in the next several years or the next decade," said Rocky Morretti, director of research at TRIP. "These costs are not even really being discussed."

In its report, TRIP summarizes [research by Cornell University](#) that shows every \$1 of deferred maintenance on roads and bridges equates to an additional \$4 to \$5 in future repairs. Although the report cites the state's lack of necessary funding to keep up with needed road and bridge improvements, it does not include an overall needs cost. TRIP does not take positions or comment on state funding issues, according to a statement from the organization.



This pothole on Detroit's east side, on Morang near 7 Mile was nasty enough to be marked on Wednesday, Feb. 21, 2018 by two orange cones. (Photo: Bill Laitner, Detroit Free Press)

Earlier this year, a 2019 [Senate Fiscal Agency report](#) outlined the rising cost of road repair in Michigan, specifically, "while the 2015 road funding package provided a substantial amount of revenue and the percentage of roads in good condition have improved both the magnitude and the timing of the funding did not prevent many roads from degrading to poor condition." The report comes to similar conclusions as TRIP — more revenue than currently budgeted is required to fix Michigan's roads.

"If we don't raise the \$2.5 billion we need to actually fix our roads the right way, with the right materials, the cost will continue to go up year after year," Whitmer said in a statement Tuesday. "Patching potholes and ignoring the problem isn't working. Instead, it's hurting our families and businesses and holding our economy back."

The Free Press has conducted its own statewide analysis of bridge conditions and will be publishing its complete investigation on the state of Michigan's bridges in the coming weeks.

https://drive.google.com/viewerng/viewer?url=https://media.freep.com/uploads/digital/MI_Progress_and_Challenges_TRIP_Report_March_2019.pdf