

No surprise here: Report says Michigan roads need fixing

By: [Joe LaFurgey](#)



GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (WOOD) — No one knows the tire-bouncing, rim-bending and shock-shocking condition of Grand Rapids area roads more than delivery driver Dan Howe.

“A lot of them, you can't tell how deep they are until you get upon them,” Howe said as he drove his delivery van towards a series of potholes on a downtown street Tuesday.

The report from a nonprofit group that tracks the conditions of roads and other transportation issues says something you probably already know: roadways in Michigan — including those on the west side of the state — are lousy.

[TRIP's report on the condition of Michigan roads](#) says despite the 2015 state road funding package — which is expected to increase spending by another \$900 million this year — there's still much work to be done.

[The TRIP report](#) says half of the roadways in West Michigan alone are in poor to mediocre condition.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer says a 45 cent increase in the gas tax will help fix the roads.

The Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, which hosted the TRIP announcement, isn't saying if they'll endorse the plan.

“Everything we do is member-driven. Our committee is going to have a robust discussion on it this month,” said Josh Lunger, who heads up government affairs for the Chamber.

One of those members is Professional Courier Services President Cathy Smith. She says while the bad roads take a toll on company vehicles, the proposed tax increase of 45 cents per gallon would take a toll on her customers, who are already paying a fuel surcharge.

“So when the gas is low, they may pay 1 percent or 2 percent,” she said. “If gas goes that high, they're going to be paying closer to 10 percent.”

In the City of Grand Rapids, roads are in somewhat better shape. That's thanks to the voter-approved 2014 income tax levy which funds major road improvements.

Grand Rapids Mayor Rosalynn Bliss says she's not sure a 45-cent hike in the gas tax is the answer. She hopes lawmakers and the governor's office take the same approach to road funding that helped the city pass the tax, regardless of the number they settle on.

“When we went out for the income tax extension, we said 100 percent of this is going to be dedicated to our streets and our infrastructure,” Bliss said of the guarantees she believes helped pass the tax.

In the meantime, motorists continue paying the price for the bad roads.

“I was driving, taking my friend to work and (the tire) went into a pothole,” said Delores Franklin as she waited for a new tire at a local shop.

The price tag on her encounter with the road crater was \$185.

She may have actually gotten off cheap.

The report by TRIP says bad roads, along with road-related congestion, delays and traffic accidents, cost the average driver in Michigan more than \$2,000 per year in vehicle maintenance and operating costs.

In the Grand Rapids area, 24 percent of area roads are in poor condition and 26 percent are considered mediocre.

The income tax has helped bring the number of roadways in good condition to 61 percent since it was passed in 2014.

TRIP says the state has also pumped more dollars into roadways since 2015.

“But even with the recent infusion of funding, a number of projects here in the Grand Rapids area and statewide can't move forward because there's not sufficient funding at this time,” said TRIP's Carolyn Bonifas Kelly.

But just where that funding will come from and in what form remains to be seen; the debate over the governor's 45 cent solution has only begun.

But the report indicates something needs to be done to fix the roads.

And try to avoid the area's new nickname.

“Like they name it Grand Raggedy. Grand Rapids is Grand Raggedy,” said Delores Franklin.

Online:

[TRIP's report on Michigan roads](#)