



TRIP report finds US freight shipments hampered by worsening conditions

By [Chris Galford](#) | October 7, 2019



© Shutterstock

The U.S. freight transportation system is under negative pressure, according to a new report released by the national transportation research nonprofit TRIP. The report, *America's Rolling Warehouses: Opportunities and Challenges with the Nation's Freight Delivery System*, highlights a variety of existing issues and problems within the system. Those issues include inadequate transportation capacity, institutional barriers to enhancing the nation's freight facilities, and lax funding for improvements to the freight network at large, as seen by faltering investments in highway improvements. Through it all, though, there is also the issue that there are not enough drivers.

Further pressuring the system are the growing pains of evolution. The nature of freight moving is altering, with advances in vehicle autonomy, manufacturing, warehousing, and supply chain automation, the move to e-commerce, and growing logistic networks pushed by ever-increasing demands for quicker delivery.

"The new TRIP report again highlights the urgent need for federal action to modernize America's infrastructure," Ed Mortimer, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Vice President for Transportation Infrastructure, said. "The future of our country's ability to compete in a 21st-century economy by providing the safe movement of commerce is at stake, and this report helps bring a spotlight to the issue."

The TRIP report ranked the top 20 U.S. states in terms of 2016 freight by value for all modes of transportation, their share of rural interstate vehicle miles of travel by combination trucks, the average annual number of large truck fatalities per one million population they saw between 2013-2017 and the largest projected increase in freight by value between 2016-2024. Texas topped those charts for freight by value, with \$2,685,364. On the other hand, Arkansas took the lead with a 32 percent share of rural interstate VMT by combination trucks. North Dakota had the misfortune of the highest fatality figures (52), while California appears to be in the best position for potential freight value increases, at 134 percent.

Overall, the report found that freight delivery is expected to keep rapidly increasing. Annually, the system moves around 17.7 billion tons of freight, representing a \$16.8 trillion value. Additionally, 12 percent of travel on interstate highways and 21 percent on rural interstate highways are undertaken by combination trucks. Traffic congestion is thus hurting the industry, increasing freight movement costs, and hitting competition and efficiency. The report found that traffic congestion led to an additional \$74.5 billion in operating costs for the trucking industry in 2016 alone.

The TRIP report calls for increased capacity for the freight transportation system, greater reliability and condition of intermodal connectors between major highways and rail, ports and waterways, greater development of vehicle autonomy and warehouse automation, improvements to road safety and additional truck parking, funding for freight transportation improvements and a permanent fix for the federal Highway Trust Fund.

"As consumers demand faster deliveries and a more responsive supply chain, the nation's freight transportation network is facing unprecedented roadblocks in the form of increasing congestion and a lack of transportation funding to improve the nation's transportation system," TRIP Executive Director Will Wilkins said. "Fixing the federal Highway Trust Fund with a long-term, sustainable source of revenue that supports needed transportation investment will be crucial to improving the efficiency and safety of our freight transportation system."