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Our Views: The bad roads get worse in Louisiana

[STAFF EDITORIAL](#) - Oct 20, 2019



Drivers on College Drive block the intersection at Bennington Avenue as traffic congestion begins to impact drivers on the approach to Interstate 10 from Perkins Road, Thursday, June 28, 2018, in Baton Rouge, La.

Advocate staff photo by HILARY SCHEINUK

[Advocate Editorial](#)

It's not news that our roads are bumpy and bad. Just *how* bad?

The latest national analysis shows us. The national transportation nonprofit TRIP said that drivers in Louisiana pay and pay for the problem, directly or indirectly.

The cost of having poor infrastructure in the state is estimated at almost \$7 billion a year. That includes not only lost time and wasted gas sitting in traffic jams but the huge costs connected to traffic crashes and automobile repairs.

New struts, anyone? Louisiana drivers pay a hidden tax — not so hidden sometimes at repair shops — because the roads and bridges around here are so deplorable.

The new TRIP report included dim reviews of roads in New Orleans, Lafayette and Baton Rouge. In Lafayette, for example, a majority of roads are in “poor” condition. In New Orleans, it's 59 percent.

The bright spot is Baton Rouge, with just over a third of streets reported as “poor.” But that doesn't mean that the capital city is a drivers' paradise, since the congestion that is choking the city daily — both on the Interstate highways and local roads — is considered an economic development crisis by the Baton Rouge Area Chamber. Countless problems are caused for farmers and loggers in rural areas when the state Department of Transportation and Development is compelled to close a bridge somewhere, almost weekly.

Both New Orleans and Baton Rouge area drivers lose 58 hours of their lives in traffic congestion, the new report said.

If all this is not exactly news, what can be done about it? There the story is mixed. Baton Rouge city taxpayers have invested more heavily in roads, passing taxes to fund big bond issues during the administrations of former Mayor-President Kip Holden and his successor, Sharon Weston Broome.

In metropolitan New Orleans and Lafayette, though, road and bridge taxes have been a harder sell. Significant conversations are now going on among politicians and community leaders in the city of New Orleans about new investments in road repairs.

In every city and parish, the overarching problem is the gasoline tax, a state revenue source that is vital to transportation across the board. And politicians at the State Capitol have refused to listen to the evidence, or even acknowledge their own experiences with substandard roads, by raising fuel taxes.

Those are at levels of 30 years ago. Purchasing power of the gasoline tax, the main source of infrastructure funding in every state, is now half of what it was in Louisiana before political paralysis set in.

Louisiana drivers will pay significantly more in repair costs than any increase in the gasoline tax will cost them. An adjustment in the tax is long past due.