

Report: Bad roads cost Las Cruces-area drivers nearly \$1,500 per year

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 LAS CRUCES - Roads and bridges that are deteriorated, congested or lack some desirable safety features cost New Mexico motorists a total of \$2.6 billion statewide annually — \$1,467 per driver in the Las Cruces urban area — due to higher vehicle operating costs, traffic crashes and congestion-related delays. Increased investment in transportation improvements at the local, state and federal levels could relieve traffic congestion, improve road, bridge and transit conditions, boost safety, and support long-term economic growth in New Mexico, according to a new report released Thursday by [TRIP](#), a Washington, DC-based national transportation research nonprofit.

The TRIP report, "[New Mexico Transportation by the Numbers: Meeting the State's Need for Safe, Smooth and Efficient Mobility](#)," finds that throughout New Mexico, more than half of major locally- and state-maintained roads are in poor or mediocre condition, six percent of locally and state-maintained bridges (20 feet or more in length) are rated poor/structurally deficient, and 1,853 people lost their lives on the state's roads from 2014-2018. The report also identifies the 20 most congested corridors in the state and finds that New Mexico's major urban roads are becoming increasingly congested, causing significant delays and choking commuting and commerce. Driving on roads in the Las Cruces area costs the average driver \$1,467 per year in the form of extra vehicle operating costs as a result of driving on roads in need of repair, lost time and fuel due to congestion-related delays, and the costs of traffic crashes in which roadway features likely were a contributing factor. A breakdown of the costs per motorist

in the state's largest urban areas, along with a statewide total, is below: "It is critical that New Mexico continues to invest in a modern and efficient roadway system throughout our state. The traveling public, visitors to our state, and our local business

Location	VOC	Safety	Congestion	TOTAL
Albuquerque	\$848	\$330	\$936	\$2,114
Las Cruces	\$829	\$262	\$376	\$1,467
Santa Fe	\$749	\$328	\$578	\$1,655
NEW MEXICO STATEWIDE	\$1.1 Billion	\$767 Million	\$725 Million	\$2.6 Billion

communities, which includes ranchers and farmers in our rural areas, deserve a reliable transportation network to support their livelihoods," said State Sen. Clemente Sanchez, D-Grants, who chairs the Senate Corporations & Transportation Committee. "We also need to ensure that the school buses our children ride on to and from school every day are operating on safe and well-maintained roads and bridges."

The TRIP report finds that 34 percent of major locally- and state-maintained roads in the Las Cruces urban area are in poor condition and another 29 percent are in mediocre condition, costing the average motorist an additional \$829 each year in extra vehicle operating costs, including accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs, and increased fuel consumption and tire wear. Statewide, 30 percent of New Mexico's major roads are in poor condition and 24 percent are in mediocre condition.

The New Mexico Department of Transportation projects an annual maintenance shortfall of approximately \$103 million and has identified nearly \$2.8 billion in needed but unfunded transportation projects throughout the state. The TRIP report includes a list of the needed projects.

"Without a substantial investment of state and local transportation funding, we will be unable to complete much-needed road and bridge infrastructure projects intended to improve the condition and efficiency of our statewide transportation system," said State Rep. Rodolpho S. Martinez, D-

Bayard. Six percent of New Mexico's bridges are rated poor/structurally deficient, with significant deterioration to the bridge deck, supports or other major components. In the Las Cruces area, seven percent of bridges are rated poor/structurally deficient.



Traffic congestion in the Las Cruces area is worsening, the report states, causing 18 annual hours of delay for the average motorist and costing the average Las Cruces driver \$376 annually in lost time and wasted fuel. The TRIP report identifies New Mexico's 20 most congested corridor segments during typical morning and evening peak travel periods, three of which are located in the Las Cruces area.

"For New Mexico to compete economically with our neighboring states and provide safe and reliable mobility for our residents, visitors and commerce, we must commit to making necessary improvements to our statewide network of roads, highways and bridges," said State Rep. Patricio Ruiloba, D-Albuquerque, chair of the House Transportation, Public Works and Capital Improvements Committee.

Traffic crashes in New Mexico claimed the lives 1,853 people between 2014 and 2018. New Mexico's overall traffic fatality rate of 1.43 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel in 2018 is the tenth highest in the nation and significantly higher than the national average of 1.13. In the Las Cruces area, on average, 21 people were killed in traffic crashes each year from 2014 to 2018. The financial impact of traffic crashes in which the lack of adequate roadway safety features were likely a contributing factor was an average of \$262 annually per each Las Cruces area driver, the study found.

"As a result of the revenue-generating activities taking place in the oil- and gas-rich areas of our state, New Mexico has an opportunity to devote additional state resources to address the critical needs on our roads and bridges," said State Rep. Cathrynn N. Brown, R-Carlsbad. "Investing today in the state's deteriorating transportation infrastructure will result in long-term benefits for New Mexico in terms of job creation, statewide economic stimulation, and reliable mobility for the traveling public."

The efficiency and condition of New Mexico's transportation system,

particularly its highways, is critical to the health of the state's economy. Annually, \$123.5 billion in goods are shipped to and from New Mexico, relying heavily on the state's network of roads and bridges.

Increasingly, companies are looking at the quality of a region's transportation system when deciding where to relocate or expand. Regions with congested or poorly maintained roads may see businesses relocate to areas with a smoother, more efficient and more modern transportation system. Approximately 350,000 full-time jobs in New Mexico in key industries like tourism, retail sales, agriculture and manufacturing are dependent on the quality, safety and reliability of the state's transportation infrastructure network.

"These conditions are only going to get worse, increasing the additional costs to motorists, if greater investment is not made available at the federal, state and local levels of government," said Will Wilkins, TRIP's executive director. "Without adequate funding, New Mexico's transportation system will become increasingly deteriorated and congested, hampering economic growth, safety and quality of life."