

Editorial: Time to address our infrastructure deficits



An aerial photo showed a key interchange between Interstate 64 and state Route 288.

DANIEL SANGJIB MIN/TIMES-DISPATCH

This past Sunday, we wrote about the Richmond region's push to better finance its transportation needs. A new report magnifies how badly infrastructure improvements are needed in the area.

According to TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based transportation research nonprofit, nearly one third of major local- and state-maintained roads are "poor or mediocre." More than 600 local- and state-maintained bridges of at least 20 feet in length are "poor/structurally deficient." Those deficits cost drivers in the Richmond area more than \$1,500 per year in added vehicle operating costs, traffic accidents and congestion delays.

"The lack of adequate, sustainable transportation funding in Virginia will lead to increasing deterioration on the state's roads and bridges and even longer congestion-related delays for commuters, businesses and visitors," Will Wilkins,

TRIP's executive director, said in a statement.

"Deteriorated, congested roads rob drivers of time and money while reducing the state's competitive advantage and threatening economic growth."

That's bad for business, and in the state that's ranked best for business, we're in need of fresh solutions to foot the bill for transportation projects. As vehicles

keep becoming more fuel efficient, the TRIP report notes gasoline and diesel consumption is projected to fall 51% by 2040. The pinch will be felt in Virginia's fuel taxes, where receipts are expected to drop 62% over the next two decades. Nearly half of all passenger cars on the road in 2040 will be electric, the report said.

If we settle for inaction, we risk seeing business go elsewhere. TRIP notes almost \$500 billion in goods move in and out of the commonwealth each year. More than 100,000 full-time jobs are supported by industries including tourism, retail, agriculture and manufacturing. Good roads and bridges are part of the puzzle.

New taxes should be met with healthy skepticism. But the TRIP report demonstrates we're already paying a steep price. It's time to address our infrastructure deficits, and the Central Virginia Regional Transportation Authority is a good start.

— *Chris Gentilviso*