

Key facts about Rhode Island's surface transportation system

May 2021

Investing in our transportation system generates jobs, fosters economic recovery and growth, and improves safety

- Investments in the surface transportation system will boost Rhode Island's economy in the short-term by creating jobs and in the long-term will enhance economic competitiveness, stimulate sustained job growth, improve access and mobility, improve traffic safety, reduce travel delays, and improve road and bridge conditions.
- Roads and highways are the backbone of our economy, allowing Rhode Island motorists to travel 7.6 billion miles annually and moving a significant portion of the \$73 billion worth of commodities shipped to and from the state each year. But, conditions on the system are deteriorating, as the need for transportation improvements far outpaces the amount of state and federal funding available.
- Vehicle travel in Rhode Island dropped by 39% in April 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic (as compared to the same month the previous year), but rebounded to 8% below March 2019 levels by March 2021.
- The design, construction and maintenance of transportation infrastructure in Rhode Island supports approximately 12,000 full-time jobs across all sectors of the state economy. Approximately 206,000 full-time jobs in Rhode Island in key industries like tourism, retail sales, agriculture and manufacturing are completely dependent on the state's transportation network.

Investing in Rhode Island's transportation system improves road and bridge conditions and reduces driver costs

- A total of 77% of Rhode Island's major roads are in poor or mediocre condition. Driving on deteriorated roads costs Rhode Island motorists \$640 million a year – \$845 per driver – in the form of additional repairs, accelerated vehicle depreciation, and increased fuel consumption and tire wear.
- A total of 19% of Rhode Island's bridges are rated in poor/structurally deficient condition, meaning there is significant deterioration to the major components of the bridge. A total of 69% of the state's bridges are at least 50 years old, an age when many bridges require significant rehabilitation or replacement.
- According to the [Status of the Nation's Highways, Bridges, and Transit, 23rd Edition](#), submitted to Congress by the USDOT in 2019, the U.S. faced a \$786 billion backlog in needed repairs and improvements to its roads and bridges. The report recommended increasing the nation's current \$105 billion investment in roads and bridges by 29% to \$136 billion annually to improve the conditions of roads and bridges, relieve congestion, and improve traffic safety.
- The current federal transportation legislation, [Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act \(FAST Act\)](#), is a major source of funding for road and bridge repairs in Rhode Island and is set to expire on September 30, 2021. The FAST-Act provided \$1.4 billion to Rhode Island from fiscal years 2016 to 2021, an average of \$233 million per year. From 2015 to 2019, the federal government provided \$2.88 for road improvements in Rhode Island for every \$1.00 state motorists paid in federal highway user fees. From 2015 to 2019, federal funds provided the equivalent of 94% of the amount of Rhode Island capital outlays on road and bridge projects, including construction, engineering and right-of-way acquisition.

Roadway improvements can reduce traffic crashes and save lives

- From 2015 through 2019, 295 people died on the state's highways, an average of 59 annual fatalities. Rhode Island's traffic fatality rate of 0.75 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel is lower than the national average of 1.11.
- A 2017 AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety [report](#) found that every \$100 million spent on needed roadway safety improvements would reduce the number of traffic fatalities by 44 and serious traffic injuries by 760 over a 20-year period. Safety improvements needed include adding passing lanes, widening lanes and shoulders, adding medians, adding turn lanes, clearing roadside objects, installing barriers, adding centerline or shoulder rumble strips, adding a bicycle lane or path, improving pedestrian safety features, converting intersections to roundabouts, providing grade separation at intersections, improving intersection signalization, and improving rail crossings.

Latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau, USDOT, FHWA, BTS, ARTBA, NHTSA, and AAA compiled and analyzed by TRIP.

