

California Congestion, Road Conditions in Need of Investment

Written by Rock Products News

According to a report released by TRIP – Restoring the Interstate Highway System: Meeting America’s Transportation Needs with a Reliable, Safe & Well-Maintained National Highway Network – in California, 86% of urban Interstate highways are considered congested during peak hours, the greatest share in the country. Vehicle travel on California’s Interstates increased 17% from 2000 to 2018. Eight percent of Interstate travel in California is by combination trucks.

“Investing in our transportation infrastructure is a win-win,” said Allan Zarembek, president and CEO of the California Chamber of Commerce. “It will get essential products to Californians and allow people to travel to work and school in a safer environment while providing much needed jobs to improve California’s economy. California’s transportation infrastructure is the backbone of our economy.”

“Carrying more than half of truck travel, the Interstate Highway System is critical to the nation’s supply chain. With \$75 billion in cost added to freight transportation each year and 67 million tons of carbon dioxide from trucks released into the air due to highway congestion, the United States cannot afford to wait any longer to make the investments necessary to address systemic and growing problems stemming from decades of neglect,” said Chris Spear, president and CEO of the American Trucking Associations. “It is past time for elected officials to provide sufficient and sustainable funding for Interstate highway improvements.”

TRIP’s report finds that while pavement smoothness on most segments of the U.S. Interstate system is acceptable, the crumbling foundations of most highway segments need to be reconstructed, and that continued resurfacing rather than addressing underlying foundational issues provides diminishing returns and results in shorter periods of pavement smoothness.

As the aging system’s foundations continue to deteriorate, most Interstate highways, bridges and interchanges will need to be rebuilt or replaced. According to the TRIP report, pavements on 6% of California’s Interstate highways are in poor condition, the ninth highest share in the nation. Four percent of California’s Interstate bridges are rated in poor/structurally deficient condition, the 10th highest share in the United States.

“A safe and well-maintained Interstate Highway System can strengthen America’s economy, enhance personal mobility and facilitate more efficient movement of goods, but the future of this network could be in jeopardy without increased federal investment,” said Kathleen Bower, AAA senior vice president of public affairs and international relations. “All states benefit from a modern, accessible Interstate Highway System. AAA urges Congress and the

current administration to prioritize transportation investments to ensure safe, efficient and reliable mobility across the United States.”

The design of the Interstate – which includes a separation from other roads and rail lines, a minimum of four lanes, paved shoulders and median barriers – makes California’s Interstates twice as safe to travel on as all other roadways. The fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles of travel on California’s Interstate in 2018 was 0.58, compared to 1.18 on the state’s non-Interstate routes. TRIP estimates that additional safety features on California’s Interstate Highway System saved 563 lives in 2018.

“With the expiration of the FAST Act rapidly approaching, this report reaffirms how critical it is for lawmakers to prioritize reauthorizing a long-term, fully funded federal highway program this year,” said Rod Schrader, chairman and CEO of Komatsu’s North American operations and chair of the Association of Equipment Manufacturers CE Sector. “Meeting the critical equipment and supply needs of essential industries including construction and agriculture requires a dependable, modernized national transportation network. Equipment manufacturers are working hard to keep these vital industries properly supplied in the midst of COVID-19 and we need lawmakers to do their part to support these essential supply chains now and for the long haul.”

The ability of states to invest in Interstate highway repairs and improvements will be hampered by the tremendous decrease in vehicle travel that has occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which is estimated to reduce state transportation revenues by at least 30% – approximately \$50 billion – over the next 18 months.

Based on the findings of the TRB Interstate report, TRIP has provided a set of recommendations for the restoration of the Interstate Highway System, which includes: the foundational reconstruction of Interstate highways, bridges and interchanges; improvement to roadway safety features; system right-sizing, including upgrading of some roadway corridors to Interstate standards; adding needed additional highway capacity on existing routes; adding additional corridors; and, modifying some urban segments to maintain connectivity while remediating economic and social disruption.

“The long-term vision that helped establish the current Interstate system nearly 65 years ago is needed again today,” said Dave Kearby, TRIP’s executive director. “In order to rebuild the nation’s economy, maintain personal and commercial mobility, and improve quality of life, adequate transportation investment and a sustainable, long-term funding source for the federal surface transportation program must remain a priority.”