

Montana's interstates see 34% increase in travel; 11% of bridges need repair or replacement

By [Editor](#) | July 15, 2020

A report released yesterday shows that vehicle travel on Montana's road system is increasing at one of the highest rates in the nation. And concurrent with the summer driving season, the survey noted that Montana's interstate fatality rate is one of the highest in the nation.

The report was released by TRIP, a private, nonprofit organization that researches, evaluates, and distributes economic and technical data on surface transportation issues. At the request of the Montana Contractors' Association, the report highlighted Montana statistics:

- The fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles of travel on Montana's Interstate in 2018 was 0.86 – the seventh highest in the U.S. – compared to 1.63 on the state's non-Interstate routes.
- TRIP estimates that additional safety features on Montana's Interstate Highway System saved 32 lives in 2018.
- Vehicle travel on Montana's Interstates increased 34 percent from 2000 to 2018, the 13th fastest rate in the nation.
- 17 percent of Interstate travel in Montana is by combination trucks (semi tractor-trailer), the 10th highest share in the U.S.
- 4 percent of Montana's Interstate bridges are rated in poor/structurally deficient condition, the 16th highest share in the U.S.
- 11 percent of Montana's Interstate bridges are in need of repair or replacement.

"This confirms what we observe when we're driving down the interstates of Montana," said MCA Executive Director David Smith. "There is more traffic, especially tractor-trailer traffic. It also is a reminder that we need to keep investing in our infrastructure."

"Federal and state gas taxes pay for highway construction," Smith added. "These are taxes paid by the users, to benefit the users. With federal funds paying more than 80 percent of highway construction costs, Montana is extremely reliant upon the federal support."

In order to match the federal support, Smith cited the Bridge and Road Safety and Accountability Act (BaRSAA) which increases Montana's fuel tax rate to \$0.33 per gallon for gasoline and \$0.2975 per gallon for diesel fuel. The increase of 6 cents per gallon over six years was approved by the legislature in 2017.

"[HB473](#) helped us keep pace with the federal match and the backlog of funding. Much of that increase goes directly to cities and counties to fix local bridges and roads," Smith said.

TRIP is a National Transportation Research Nonprofit. Founded in 1971, TRIP informs and promotes policies that improve the movement of goods and people, make surface travel safer, and enhance economic development and productivity. <https://tripnet.org/>