

TRIP: Maryland Interstate System a Mess

Written by Rock Products News
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The rate of congestion, travel volume and pavement deterioration on Maryland's Interstate Highway System are among the highest in the nation, according to a new report released by TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit. The report, "Restoring Maryland's Interstate Highway System: Meeting Maryland's Transportation Needs with a Reliable, Safe & Well-Maintained National Highway Network," looks at the use, condition and benefits of Maryland's Interstate system.

According to TRIP's report, from 2000 to 2018, vehicle travel on Maryland's Interstates has increased at a rate nine times faster than the rate at which new lane capacity has been added. As a result, Maryland's Interstates are the second busiest and the second most congested in the U.S. The tremendous use of the system has also led to increased deterioration on Maryland's Interstate highways, with the share of Interstate pavement in poor condition in Maryland the 11th highest in the U.S. Travel on Maryland's Interstate highways is more than twice as safe as travel on all other roads in the state.

While Maryland's Interstate Highway System accounts for only 4% of roadway lane miles in the state, it carries 30% of the state's vehicle travel. From 2000 to 2018, vehicle travel on Maryland's Interstate Highways increased 18%. During that same time, lane miles of Interstates in Maryland increased just 2%.

The increase in vehicle travel without a corresponding addition of lane miles has led to mounting congestion on the state's Interstates. According to the TRIP report, 82% of Maryland's urban Interstates are considered congested because they carry traffic levels that result in significant delays during peak travel hours – the second highest rate in the U.S. Maryland's Interstates are the second busiest in the nation, as measured by average daily traffic per lane mile. TRIP's report identifies the busiest portions of Maryland's Interstate system, including two sections of I-270, two sections of I-495 and a portion of I-95/I-495.

The TRIP report also identifies the most congested segments of freeways or expressways in Maryland during a.m. and p.m. peak travel times, the vast majority of which are on the state's Interstate highways.

Pavements on 5% of Maryland's Interstate highways are in poor condition, the 11th highest share in the nation. As the aging Interstate system's foundations continue to deteriorate, most Interstate highways, bridges and interchanges will need to be rebuilt or replaced. Continued resurfacing rather than addressing underlying foundational issues provides diminishing returns and results in shorter periods of pavement smoothness. Six percent of Maryland's Interstate pavements are rated in mediocre condition, 8% are in fair condition and the remaining 80% are in good condition.

Two percent of Maryland's Interstate bridges are rated in poor/structurally deficient condition. A bridge is rated in poor/structurally deficient condition if there is significant deterioration of the bridge deck, supports or other major components. Seventy-two percent of Maryland's Interstate bridges are rated in fair condition and the remaining 26% are in good condition. Twenty-two percent of Maryland's Interstate bridges are in need of repair or replacement, and 52% of the state's Interstate bridges are 50 years or older.

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 Maryland's Interstates more than two-and-a-half times safer to travel on as all other roadways. The fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles of travel on Maryland's Interstate in 2018 was 0.40 compared to 1.03 on the state's non-Interstate routes. TRIP estimates that additional safety features on Maryland's Interstate Highway System saved 108 lives in 2018. While Maryland's Interstate Highway System carried 30% of the state's travel in 2018, it accounted for only 14% of the state's traffic fatalities as a result of superior safety features.

Restoring and upgrading the Interstate Highway System to meet the nation's 21st century transportation

needs will require strong federal leadership and a robust federal-state partnership to reestablish the Interstate Highway System as the nation's premier transportation network. The current federal surface transportation program, Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST Act), the primary source of Interstate highway funding, expires on Sept. 30, 2020, and the reauthorization of a new long-term, adequately and reliably funded long-term federal program will be needed to ensure that a strong federal program supports the restoration of the Interstate system.

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 approximately \$16 billion in 2020 and by \$37 billion over a five-year period.

Based on the findings of a 2019 report by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) that was requested by Congress, TRIP has provided a set of recommendations for the restoration of the Interstate Highway System, which include: 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."