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## Bad roads costly to drivers, group reports

[By Keith Inman Sun Staff Writer](#)

JONESBORO — Roads and bridges that are deteriorated, congested or lack some desirable safety features cost Arkansas motorists a total of \$3.2 billion statewide annually, according to a recent report by TRIP, a Washington, D.C., based national transportation research nonprofit.

That's \$1,174 per driver in the Jonesboro urban area due to higher vehicle operating costs, traffic crashes and congestion-related delays. Increased investment in transportation improvements at the local, state and federal levels could relieve traffic congestion, improve road, bridge and transit conditions, boost safety, and support long-term economic growth in Arkansas, the report stated.

The TRIP report, "Arkansas Transportation by the Numbers: Meeting the State's Need for Safe, Smooth and Efficient Mobility," finds that throughout Arkansas, more than half of major locally and state-maintained roads are in poor or mediocre condition, 5 percent of locally and state-maintained bridges longer than 20 feet are rated poor/structurally deficient, and 2,551 people lost their lives on the state's roads from 2014-2018. There were 18 fatalities in the Jonesboro area during that time.

TRIP is sponsored by insurance companies, equipment manufacturers, distributors and suppliers; businesses involved in highway and transit engineering and construction; labor unions; and organizations concerned with efficient and safe surface transportation. It issues customized reports for states across the country.

While the report doesn't mention a proposed state constitutional amendment that voters will decide Nov. 3, Kevin Hodges, chairman of the Jonesboro Regional Chamber of Commerce, said it's hard not to discuss Issue 1, which would make permanent a half-cent sales tax voters approved in 2012 as part of the Arkansas Department of Transportation's Connecting Arkansas Program. That tax is scheduled to expire June 30, 2023.

"We think if we don't have the resources that's going to be designated for the future, we're not going to be

able to maintain," Hodges said Thursday. "And I think more importantly, from my perspective as a chamber person, is when you're trying to recruit industry and you're trying to grow economically, if you don't have good access and you don't have potential to be able to expand, those folks look at that kind of stuff. They look at how to get in and around your community with their goods and services ... We've got to be able to compete."

He said the TRIP report reaffirms the fact the region's economic growth and quality of life for residents is directly linked to the condition, safety and efficiency of the transportation system.

State highway officials have said the current half-cent sales tax costs the average household \$8 per month.

TRIP estimates motorists pay even more because of deteriorating roads and bridges.

The TRIP report finds that 24 percent of major locally and state-maintained roads in the Jonesboro urban area are in poor or mediocre condition, costing the average motorist an additional \$322 each year in extra vehicle operating costs, including accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs, and increased fuel consumption and tire wear. Statewide, 26 percent of Arkansas' major roads are in poor condition and 26 percent are in mediocre condition.

The group Americans for Prosperity, along with the Central Arkansas Group of the Arkansas Sierra Club and Little Rock's Downtown Neighborhood Association, have mobilized opposition to the measure under the name No Permanent Tax. No on Issue 1.

Joshua Silverstein, a law professor, and co-chairman of the committee, said "Giving ArDOT a permanent one-half percent sales tax in the State Constitution with no restrictions on how the money will be used is bad public policy.

"Should Arkansans vote down the sales tax in November, the state will have over two and a half years to develop an equitable and rational approach to road maintenance and transportation before the current temporary tax expires."

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