

Report: Fort Smith drivers spend \$1.4K annually in vehicle costs due to roads



The sidewalk along Jenny Lind Road near the roadway's intersection with Interstate 540 is seen. [COURTESY CITY OF FORT SMITH]

By [Max Bryan](#)

High vehicle maintenance and repair costs for Fort Smith residents are linked to the roads they drive on, one research group suggests.

The national transportation research group TRIP estimated in a September [report](#) that motorists in the city on average spend \$1,468 in vehicle expenses from roads in the city that are “deteriorated, congested and lack some desirable safety features.” TRIP analysts calculated the figure from estimates of vehicle operating costs from rough roads, cost of traffic crashes where a lack of adequate safety features was a contributing factor and yearly cost of lost time and wasted fuel due to congestion from data about the city’s major roadways collected in 2018 and in years prior.

The city had the third-highest estimated motorist cost for Arkansas’ seven largest urban areas behind Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway and West Memphis, according to the report. Seven Main transportation routes in the city are parts of state highways and thus maintained by the Arkansas Department of Transportation.

“While the City of Fort Smith was not asked to participate in, or provide information to the TRIP organization, the City of Fort Smith acknowledges the spirit of the TRIP report and agrees that more transportation infrastructure funding would be extremely beneficial to the City of Fort Smith as well as all communities around Arkansas,” City Communication Manager Shari Cooper said in an emailed response to the report.

Fort Smith in the study outpaced the state with an estimated 57% of roads listed as in poor or mediocre condition. Drivers in the city were estimated to spend \$623 from driving on rough roads, \$361 on traffic crashes likely due to deficient road safety features and \$484 on lost time and fuel congestion.

The city’s estimates reflected the overall message of the report, which estimates Arkansas motorists spend a collective \$3.2 billion

each a year driving on roads that have not been adequately funded at state or local levels. It estimated 52% of all roads in the state were either in poor or mediocre condition. As it followed, \$1.6 billion — exactly half — of money estimated to be spent in the state due to driving on deficient roads was attributed to driving on rough roads.

“Modernizing Arkansas’ transportation system is critical to quality of life and economic competitiveness in the Natural State. Inadequate transportation investment, which will result in deteriorated transportation facilities and diminished access, will negatively affect Arkansas’ economic competitiveness and quality of life,” the report reads.

The report was released amid Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson arguing in favor of [Issue 1](#) on the Nov. 3 state ballot, which would prevent the 2023 sunset of transportation sales tax by adding a half-percent sales tax to the state constitution. The tax would annually put \$205 million toward state-maintained roadways such as those in Fort Smith and \$85 million toward city and county street funds.

This ties directly into the transportation discussion in Fort Smith, where routes including Rogers and Towson avenues, Zero Street and Midland Boulevard are maintained by the state.

The Fort Smith Board of Directors in January passed a resolution to support the ballot issue. The resolution stated the “investment will create jobs, aid in economic development, improve quality of life, and provide additional transportation structure.”

As for main roads under Fort Smith jurisdiction, Cooper in her statements noted the city’s Streets and Traffic Control and Engineering departments have maintenance and road repair plans included in the city’s annual capital improvement plans. This includes the upcoming completion of a \$1.7 million project at Jenny Lind Road’s intersection with Interstate 540 that includes an overlay, new curbs, sidewalks and a new bridge.

[Towson Avenue](#) once rehabilitated by the city and the Department of Transportation will be turned over to the city for maintenance. The rehab, which is expected to be completed in 2024, will cost the city up to \$2 million of the estimated \$12.5 million needed for the project.

Cooper in her statements also noted the city has conducted ongoing maintenance and minor construction throughout the city’s more than 500 miles of roadways. It included 143 days patching potholes, construction or reconstruction of 2,283 feet of curb and gutter and flushing out 7,529 feet of storm drains and culverts in 2019.

“Work performed by the Street Construction program improves vehicular and pedestrian connectivity, accessibility and traffic flow,” Cooper stated. “Recent street drainage improvements have improved vehicular and pedestrian connectivity, accessibility and traffic flow.”

Founded in 1971, TRIP is a transportation research nonprofit based in Washington, D.C. Its researchers collect economic and technical data on surface-level transportation issues across the United States.