

TRIP: Georgia Transportation Funding Inadequate for Growth

A smooth, safe and efficient transportation network will be key to future economic growth and progress in Georgia, according to a new report released by TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit. The statewide report, "Moving Georgia Forward: Road and Bridge Conditions, Traffic Safety, Travel Trends and Funding Needs in the Atlanta Region," compiles a series of 12 regional reports that examine travel and population trends, road and bridge conditions, traffic safety, congestion, and transportation funding needs in Georgia.

TRIP has also prepared reports for each of the following regions: Atlanta, Central Savannah River Area, Coastal Georgia, Georgia Mountains, Heart of Georgia Altamaha, Middle Georgia, Northeast Georgia, Northwest Georgia, River Valley, Southern Georgia, Southwest Georgia and Three Rivers.

TRIP surveyed Georgia counties in late 2019 and early 2020 regarding the condition and funding needs of their transportation system. According to results of that survey, 22% of county-maintained roads in Georgia are in poor condition. Current funding will only allow for 12% of the miles of county-maintained roads in need of resurfacing and 8% of county-maintained roads in need of reconstruction to be addressed this year. In fact, the amount anticipated to be spent by Georgia county governments in 2020 on highways and bridges is only 52% of the total amount needed.

Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) Commissioner Russell McMurry said, "In 2018, our great team at GDOT finished more than 90% of our projects under budget, even as we've seen tremendous political leadership in taking Georgia's transportation infrastructure investment to the next level. All the same, as one of the fastest growing states in America, we know that our future needs far outstretch the available public resources. The data in these reports really helps quantify that need in a clear, concise way that will enable us to make wise strategic decisions about future investments."

According to the TRIP report, 10% (1,551 of 14,799) of locally and state-maintained bridges in Georgia are rated as deficient. Bridges that are rated as deficient meet at least one of the following criteria: significant deterioration of a major component of the bridge; restriction to carrying only lighter-weight vehicles; or a carrying capacity of 18 tons or less which restricts larger commercial vehicles.

The statewide TRIP report includes a list of the 10 most deficient bridges in each region, based on the number of categories in which a bridge ranked deficient and average daily traffic (ADT). TRIP's reports for each region

include lists of up to 40 of the most deficient bridges in each area.

"Under the strong leadership of Gov. Brian Kemp, Speaker David Ralston and Lt. Governor Geoff Duncan, Georgia was yet again ranked as the number-one state in which to do business," said Georgia Chamber CEO Chris Clark. "That continues the previous decade of strong leadership, and we know that one critical component of that economic success is the quality of our transportation network. As we look to a future that will catapult us to the fifth largest state in America by 2030, we know that transportation investment will only grow as a pillar of our economic success."

A total of 7,192 people were killed in traffic crashes in Georgia from 2014 to 2018, an average of 1,438 fatalities per year. The state had a traffic fatality rate of 1.14 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel in 2018, near the national average of 1.13.

Improving safety on Georgia's roadways can be achieved through further improvements in vehicle safety; improvements in driver, pedestrian, and bicyclist behavior; and, a variety of improvements in roadway safety features.

Reliable highway access is critical to the economic development of the Atlanta Region. At a time when a significant increase in freight deliveries are forecast for Georgia, the quality of the region's transportation system will have a significant impact on its ability to attract economic development.

Every year, \$843 billion in goods are shipped to and from sites in Georgia, mostly by trucks. Seventy-six percent of freight delivered to or from sites in Georgia are shipped by truck and another 14% are shipped by multiple modes, including trucking.

The value of freight shipped to and from sites in Georgia, in inflation-adjusted dollars, is expected to increase 115% by 2045 and by 89% for goods shipped by trucks. But, the ability of the state's freight transportation system to efficiently and safely accommodate the growing demand for freight movement could be hampered by deficient roads and bridges, including bridges that are not able to carry large commercial vehicles.

"A robust and reliable transportation system that is maintained in good condition, can accommodate large commercial vehicles, and is reliable and safe is vital to the quality of life of the Atlanta region's residents, the success and growth of businesses, and the positive experience of its visitors," said Dave Kearby, TRIP's executive director.