

Springfield-area drivers pay steep price for lack of good roads, according to national study

By [Joe Hickman](#) | Thursday, December 3, 2020



SPRINGFIELD, Mo. (KY3) - A lot of us like to gripe about the condition of the roads we drive on but according to a national study, we have right to complain because it's costing us quite a bit of money.

TRIP is a Washington D.C.-based nonprofit group that does research on our nation's transportation system and on Thursday they released their findings on Missouri which showed that over half the state's roads are in need of repair or replacement.

"Currently we have a list of \$825 million a year in needs that are unmet," said Ed Hassinger, the Deputy Director and Chief Engineer for the Missouri Department of Transportation. "And these aren't wants, these are needs."

In the Springfield area 44 percent of roads are categorized as either "poor" or "mediocre" and the wear-and-tear on our cars plus the 34 hours annually spent in traffic congestion cost the average Springfield driver \$1,584 per year in extra operating costs.

"These costs include the costs of driving on rough roads which are beating up motorists vehicles, the value of lost time and wasted fuel due to traffic congestion and the economic cost of serious and fatal traffic crashes in the region," TRIP Director of Policy and Research Rocky Moretti said in explaining the contributing factors. "On average 32 people annually are being killed in traffic crashes in the Springfield area and we know if adequate roadway safety features were able to be provided in the region, we could see a significant reduction in traffic fatalities."

The study also said six percent of Springfield-area bridges (26 of 466) are structurally unsound compared to nine percent

statewide (2,116 out of 24,512) and that despite the governor's recent funding to fix 45 bridges by the end of 2020, more needs to be done quickly as 40 percent of Missouri's bridges were built before 1969.

"Did we cure the patient? No," said Len Toenjes, Chairman of the Missouri Workforce Development Board and President of the Associated General Contractors. "We put a band-aid on an open wound. There's still a large number of bridges that need to be repaired or replaced."

Hassinger said new revenue possibilities include changing registration fees or a 10-cent increase in the gas tax that voters previously turned down in 2018.

"What we see in this report really confirms what we know at MoDOT," he added. "That we have just not invested the necessary resources in transportation to keep our system in good shape and not making the improvements that are necessary to move us forward."

Hassinger also pointed to another problem that will happen even if new funding does become available from the federal government.

"Our (state) funding levels are so low that we really have trouble matching currently the federal funds that we try to bring to Missouri," he said.

Because of Missouri's centralized location, the study shows \$469 billion worth of goods move through the state's transportation system every year and Toenjes warned that if the road system isn't improved, businesses might relocate to other areas.

"It happened in the 20th century when all the transit went to Chicago," he said. "We're at that critical point again. All we're doing is patching and repairing. Not building, not replacing, not creating a viable highway system for today and tomorrow. And the 'why?' is Missouri and MoDOT has inadequate resources."

So what happens if new resources are not found?

"We'll be managing the decline of the system to the best ability we can," Hassinger answered. "What is the cost of doing nothing? It really shows up in the cost of operating your vehicle, it shows in lost economic opportunity, it shows in sitting in congestion and most importantly it really shows up in people not being safe on the roadways."