

THE DAILY GAZETTE

WHEN CREDIBILITY MATTERS

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2020

CAPITAL REGION

Roads, bridges make commutes costly

Transportation group releases report

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File

The ride to work isn't going to get better anytime soon.

That was part of the information released Tuesday morning in the annual New York Transportation by the Numbers report from TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit.

The report examines the condition, use and safety of New York's roads, highways and bridges and shows that driver commutes and road conditions in the Capital Region are costly.

Capital Region drivers pay \$519 annually in vehicle operating costs as a result of driving on rough roads, another \$736 in wasted fuel because of traffic congestion and an additional \$913 in related costs due to traffic crashes where a lack of safety features was a contributing factor for a total price tag of \$2,168 a year.

According to TRIP, 22 percent of the Capital Region roads are in poor condition, 24 percent are mediocre, and 21 percent are fair.

More striking is that 72 of the Capital Region's bridges are poor or structurally deficient and 474 or 57 percent of the bridges are in fair condition.

And those drivers tired of waiting in traffic on the Northway are not alone.

Capital Region drivers lost 49 hours last year to traffic congestion, only second to the New York-Newark-Jersey City with a whopping 92 hours. That equaled more than 7 million gallons of wasted gas, 21 gallons per driver, totaling \$736 per year.

The Capital Region has recorded an average of 76 vehicle fatalities each year over the past five-year period, adding almost \$1,000 to each driver's annual expenses.

The solution is money – and lots of it.

Funds come from local, state, and federal governments, but funds at each level are lacking.

Revenue from New York's motor fuel tax declined with better fuel efficiency and the more common use of electric vehicles. The federal fuel tax on gas and diesel fuel are also declining.

The 2015 Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act [FAST Act] set to expire in Sept. 2020 was extended by Congress for one year and provided \$8.9 billion to the state for road repairs and improvements.

It still isn't enough.

"This is a sobering report on the conditions of our roads and more importantly the connection to the impact of the average resident," New York State Assemblyman John McDonald (D-108 Albany) said during a Zoom press conference Tuesday. "The fact that here in the Capital Region the average resident loses over \$2,000 annually due to the conditions of the roads is something that should get all our attention immediately.

"We need to continue to have that difficult discussion through this state about how we're going to provide sustainable funding to fix our roads and our bridges." McDonald spoke of a sobering statistic that impacts all drivers.

"The gas tax at the federal level hasn't been raised since Ronald Regan was president," McDonald said. "Although no one wants to raise taxes, we need to find a way to do this particularly as our economy and our drivers are moving towards electric vehicles. That gas tax(es), federal and state is not going to be a sustainable fund going forward."

Assemblywoman Patricia Fahey (D-109 Albany) hopes that additional funding becomes available under President-elect Joe Biden.

"We need that federal help; and I couldn't agree more with (Assemblyman) Magnarelli it should be in the first 100 days, we thought that would happen four years ago, quite frankly," Fahey said. "There was bi-partisan agreement, we thought we would see infrastructure investments and we didn't."

She also stressed during the Zoom press conference the importance of safety measures to protect pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers.

"We need safer pedestrian crossings, we need the traffic control infrastructure investments that have made a tremendous difference here in Albany," Fahey said. "We need those bike lanes to make sure all are safe."

"We have an aging baby boomer population in this state, so those pedestrian crossings are absolutely essential as well as sidewalks where applicable."

Fahey was adamant that improved safety is possible at minimal costs to the taxpayers.

"It's unbelievable what paint can do in making sure that we have safer pedestrian crossings as well as bike lanes as well as safer bus lanes," Fahey said. "Sometimes it's just a matter of paint investment."