

TRIP: West Virginia Drivers Lose \$1.6 Billion a Year



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Roads and bridges that are deteriorated, congested, or lack some desirable safety features cost West Virginia motorists a total of \$1.6 billion statewide annually—as much as \$1,421 per driver in some urban areas—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 West Virginia, according to a new report released today by TRIP, a Washington, DC-based national transportation research nonprofit.

The TRIP report, “West Virginia Transportation by the Numbers: Meeting the State’s Need for Safe, Smooth and Efficient Mobility,” finds that throughout West Virginia, more than half of major locally and state-maintained roads are in poor or mediocre condition, 21 percent of locally and state-maintained bridges (20 feet or more in length) are rated poor/structurally deficient, and nearly 1,400 people lost their lives on the state’s roads from 2015-2019. West Virginia’s major urban roads are congested, causing significant delays and choking commuting and commerce.

Driving on deficient West Virginia roads costs state’s drivers a total of \$1.6 billion per year in the form of extra vehicle operating costs (VOC) as a result of driving on roads in need of repair, lost time and fuel due to congestion-related delays, and the costs of traffic crashes in which the lack of adequate roadway features likely were a contributing factor. The report includes regional pavement and bridge conditions, a list of the most congested corridors, highway safety data, and cost breakdowns for the Beckley, Charleston, Huntington, Morgantown, Parkersburg, Weirton-Stuebenville, and Wheeling urban areas, as well as statewide.

The TRIP report finds that 31 percent of West Virginia’s major roads are in poor condition and 24 percent are in mediocre condition. Driving on deteriorated roads costs the state’s motorists an additional \$825 million each year in extra vehicle operating costs, including accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs, and increased fuel

consumption and tire wear. Eighteen percent of West Virginia’s major roads are in fair condition and the remaining 27 percent are in good condition.

Statewide, 21 percent of West Virginia’s bridges are rated poor/structurally deficient – the second highest rate in the nation. Bridges that are in poor/structurally deficient condition have significant deterioration to the

bridge deck, supports or other major components. Fifty-three percent of the state’s bridges are rated in fair condition and the remaining 26 percent are rated good.

“Improving infrastructure in West Virginia gives our people a renewed hope,” said Byrd White, secretary of the West Virginia Department of Transportation and commissioner of the West Virginia Department of Highways. “We have a unique opportunity to build West Virginia up, and it’s a critical point in the history of this state — a turning point. Everyone who works in state government right now is giving their all and working together as one team, that’s team West Virginia. The TRIP report is a tool that’s going to help us reach where we need, to give our citizens the chance to build a future they deserve.”

Traffic crashes in West Virginia claimed the lives of 1,394 people from 2015 to 2019. West Virginia’s overall traffic fatality rate of 1.36 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel in 2019 is higher than the national average of 1.11 and the 13th highest in the U.S. In the Charleston urban area, on average, 26 people were killed in traffic crashes each year from 2015 to 2019. The financial impact of West Virginia traffic crashes in which the lack of adequate roadway safety features were likely a contributing factor was \$478 million annually per year.

In 2019, the state’s transportation system carried 19.1 billion annual vehicle miles of travel (VMT). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, vehicle travel in West Virginia dropped by as much as 40 percent in April 2020 (as compared to vehicle travel during the same month the previous year), but rebounded to 11 percent below the previous year’s volume in November 2020. Congested roads choke commuting and commerce and cost West Virginia drivers \$300 million each year in the form of lost time and wasted fuel.

“West Virginia’s extensive infrastructure system provides the state’s residents, visitors, and businesses with a high level of mobility and a better quality of life,” said Mike Clowser, chairman of the West Virginia Business and Industry Council. “Good roads and bridges provide West Virginia with the opportunity to compete with other states in attracting jobs and economic development. Investing in roads and bridges is key to West Virginia’s economic future.”