

# The Herald-Dispatch

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## Report: Poor roads cost WV drivers \$1,200 annually for vehicle repairs, fuel

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CHARLESTON — Deteriorated, congested, and unsafe roads and bridges cost metro Charleston drivers an average of \$1,280 a year in extra costs for vehicle repairs, wasted fuel, and lost time, an annual study released Tuesday by a Washington, D.C.-based national transportation research nonprofit concludes.

For metro Huntington drivers, that annual additional cost is slightly less, averaging \$1,273, the TRIP report determined.

Statewide, poor road conditions cost state drivers a total of \$1.6 billion annually, the report concluded.

The TRIP report found that 31% of West Virginia's primary roads are in poor condition and 24% are in mediocre condition, based on an analysis of Federal Highways Administration data.

Only 18% of roads are in fair condition, and only 27% are in good condition, according to Federal Highways Administration data.

Similarly, citing Federal Highways Administration data, the study found that 21% of bridges in the state are structurally deficient, 53% are in fair condition, and only 26% are in good condition.

The report noted that the poor condition of state roads and bridges is the result of the ongoing lack of sufficient state and federal highways funding.

It cites the 2015 report of the state Blue Ribbon Commission on Highways, which found that the state would need to spend an additional \$1.1 billion a year — effectively doubling the current Division of Highways budget — in order to complete and adequately maintain the state highways system.

The TRIP report notes that in 2017, the Roads to Prosperity initiative authorized the sale of up to \$1.6 billion in road bonds, an amount far less than what is needed for road construction and maintenance.

“These conditions are only going to get worse, increasing the additional costs to motorists, if greater investment is not made available at the federal, state and local levels of government,” Dave Kearby, TRIP executive director, said in a statement. “Without adequate funding, West Virginia's transportation system will become increasingly deteriorated and congested, hampering economic growth, safety and quality of life.”

Mike Clowser, chairman of the West Virginia Business and Industry Council, added, “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.”

Gov. Jim Justice did not address increasing highways funding in his State of the State address last Wednesday, and has proposed a “zero-growth, flat” 2021-22 state budget that has no new funding initiatives and actually cuts spending by \$4.8 million from the current budget.

The annual report is normally released during a Capitol news conference, usually coinciding with an annual West Virginians for Better Transportation rally at the Capitol. Both events were made impossible by the Capitol's closure to the public during the pandemic.

Founded in 1971, TRIP is a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit group supported by manufacturing, insurance, construction, labor and engineering organizations. The group's name is not an acronym.

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