

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 2021

## Denver drivers spent 39 fewer hours in traffic in 2020



By [Ethan Nelson](#) — Data Reporter, Denver Business Journal

The average Denver-area driver spent 39 fewer hours in congested traffic in 2020, thanks to coronavirus-related office and business closures.

Still, drivers spent on average 24 hours in congested traffic last year, the 16th-most out of any metro in the country, according to a new report from transportation intelligence company Inrix. In 2019, Denver ranked 21st.

Denver also saw one of the largest drops in trips to its downtown out of any city

Cherry Creek construction traffic backs up on a Friday afternoon on University Blvd. and East 1st Ave. Kathleen Lavine | Denver Business Journal

between February and April 2020. At that time, 83% fewer trips to downtown were recorded. As of February 2021, trips to Denver's downtown were down 48% from the year before, according to the report.

Drivers in a few other U.S. cities, like Pittsburgh, Nashville, Tennessee, and Raleigh, North Carolina, lost zero hours to sitting in heavy traffic last year, according to Inrix.

The average driver in many other cities lost at least a few hours, including cities like Miami, Dallas, Seattle, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Chicago and Boston. Those cities saw drops of 34% to 75% in hours lost to congestion. The average U.S. driver lost 26 hours in congestion in 2020, but reclaimed 73 hours of what they had lost in 2019.

See how Denver stacked up against other cities:

### U.S. cities by average hours spent in traffic

2020 rank (2019)	Urban Area	2020 Hours Lost	YoY Hours Lost	2020 Cost Per Driver	YoY Per Driver Savings	2020 City Cost	YoY City Savings	YoY Collisions
1 (4)	New York City, NY	100	-28%	\$1,486	\$607	\$7.7B	\$3.3B	-38%
2 (3)	Philadelphia, PA	94	-34%	\$1,388	\$735	\$3.3B	\$1.2B	-28%
3 (2)	Chicago, IL	86	-40%	\$1,279	\$889	\$4.6B	\$3.0B	-5%
4 (1)	Boston, MA	48	-68%	\$711	\$1,517	\$1.4B	\$2.7B	-33%
5 (6)	Los Angeles, CA	45	-56%	\$664	\$876	\$3.6B	\$4.6B	-21%
6 (7)	San Francisco, CA	47	-51%	\$697	\$753	\$1.1B	\$1.9B	-28%
7 (13)	New Orleans, LA	42	-47%	\$617	\$564	\$300M	\$200M	0%
8 (11)	Houston, TX	35	-56%	\$523	\$688	\$1.5B	\$2.2B	-20%
9 (12)	Miami, FL	35	-57%	\$512	\$699	\$1.3B	\$2.2B	-8%
10 (20)	Dallas, TX	34	-46%	\$503	\$439	\$1.6B	\$1.3B	-32%
11 (15)	Stamford, CT	38	-48%	\$564	\$542	\$200M	\$300M	-30%*
12 (5)	Washington, DC	29	-77%	\$427	\$1,426	\$1.1B	\$3.0B	-26%
13 (9)	Baltimore, MD	27	-68%	\$402	\$854	\$500M	\$800M	-18%
14 (8)	Portland, OR	27	-69%	\$403	\$928	\$400M	\$800M	-28%
15 (14)	Seattle, WA	25	-67%	\$366	\$741	\$600M	\$1.2B	-35%
16 (21)	Denver, CO	24	-61%	\$359	\$583	\$450M	\$950M	-29%
17 (17)	Providence, RI	24	-65%	\$358	\$688	\$250M	\$550M	-26%
18 (59)	Santa Rosa, CA	26	4%	\$384	(\$10)	\$100M	\$2M	-30%*
19 (25)	San Juan, PR	22	-49%	\$329	\$329	\$200M	\$200M	-30%*
20 (35)	Ann Arbor, MI	25	-22%	\$368	\$111	\$50M	\$20M	-30%*

Fewer cars stuck in traffic have important cost implications – Inrix estimates that each Denver driver in 2020 spent \$359 on driving-related expenses, \$583 less than in 2019. That translates to a total of \$450 million in driver-related costs for the area’s drivers, a nearly billion-dollar drop from 2019.

But just because in 2020 drivers might be spending less on their cars, heavy congestion in normal years still bears costs in both dollars and time for Denver drivers, according to another group’s calculation.

[Denver-area drivers spend almost \\$2,000 a year](#) in costs related to fuel wasted sitting in congested traffic and road repairs, according to a report released last week by Washington, D.C.-based research organization TRIP. TRIP’s numbers were based on data from the more typical 2019.

The think tank estimates that Denver drivers spend \$1,974 annually due to traffic delays – that’s a function of both the fuel spent crawling at a turtle’s pace and poor road conditions. The average motorist was stuck in traffic for 62 more hours in 2019 than they should have been because of congestion, costing them 26 gallons of fuel and \$1,242, TRIP reported. Denver-area roads, 37% of which it classified as poor, added another \$732 in repair costs to the average driver’s vehicle.

"No matter which lens you look at it, the engineering lens, the consumer lens, the commuter lens, they all point to the same thing," said [Mike Kopp](#), president and CEO of Colorado Concern and head of transportation-focused business group A Way Forward. "Our traffic woes are getting worse."

Colorado is also [pushing forward with a plan](#) that could require large employers to reduce the percentage of their workers that commute in single-occupancy, gas-burning vehicles by 40% on a daily basis by the year 2025.

The two reports and the push for employers to implement strategies that reduce the employee single-occupancy vehicle commuter rate come as the [Colorado General Assembly and Gov. Jared Polis debate how to address badly needed road repair projects](#). Polis has said since November that he’d like to throw \$200 million at transportation projects, but so far only \$30 million of that figure has been debated in the Legislature. That \$30 million will go toward a program that would improve state highways that run through downtowns by adding crosswalks and improving turn lanes.

"It’s a lifestyle issue," Kopp said. "People ask, 'How much time am I willing to mindlessly lose to traffic?' The problem is getting worse, not better."

But since Polis announced his plan to get money to road projects, including Interstate 70 bridges in the west metro Denver area and repairs of the Eisenhower-Johnson Tunnel on that highway, none of that work has been funded. The Colorado Department of Transportation estimates that the Eisenhower alone needs \$150 million in repairs.

Legislative Democrats’ proposed transportation funding plan faces controversy over fees it would raise, mostly from state Republican legislators, which could stall the proposal in debates.

Some legislators have proposed dipping into the state’s general fund to help finance transportation projects. One research organization has described the current financing model as outdated.

“Colorado’s primary source of transportation revenue, the per-gallon tax on motor fuels, has not seen a rate change since 1991,” the Greenwood Village-based Common Sense Institute reported in July. “The resulting loss of purchasing power from higher fuel efficiency and construction inflation has been only slightly offset by inconsistent state General Fund dollars [income and sales taxes] and higher registration fees.”