

## TRIP: Colorado Roads, Bridges Increasingly Deteriorated

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Colorado's congested and deteriorated transportation network threatens to diminish quality of life and hamper economic growth and recovery in one of the fastest growing states in the nation, according to a new report released by TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based national transportation research nonprofit. 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 Colorado.

The TRIP report, "Keeping Colorado Mobile," finds that Colorado's major urban roads are congested, causing significant delays and choking commuting and commerce. Nearly half of Colorado's major locally and state-maintained roads are in poor or mediocre condition, 5% of locally and state-maintained bridges (20 ft. or more in length) are rated poor/structurally deficient, and more than 3,000 people lost their lives on the state's roads from 2015 to 2019.

Congested roads, highways and bottlenecks choke commuting and commerce and cost Colorado drivers \$3.5 billion each year in the form of lost time and wasted fuel. From 2000 to 2019, vehicle travel in Colorado increased by 31%, the ninth highest rate in the country. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, vehicle travel in Colorado dropped by as much as 42% in April 2020 (as compared to vehicle travel during the same month the previous year) but rebounded to 10% below the previous year's volume in November 2020.

Traffic congestion causes up to 62 annual hours of delay for the motorists in some urban areas and costs drivers as much as \$1,242 annually in lost time and wasted fuel. The chart below lists Colorado's 10 most congested highway segments based on measuring volume of traffic carried by a roadway compared to its capacity. A chart of the 25 most congested highway segments in Colorado is included in the report.

The TRIP report finds that 22% of major locally and state-maintained roads in Colorado are in poor condition and another 25% are in mediocre condition, costing the state's drivers an additional \$2.8 billion each year in extra vehicle operating costs, including accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs, and increased fuel consumption and tire wear. Eighteen percent of Colorado's major roads are in fair condition and the remaining 34% are in good condition.

"Our struggling transportation systems hurt the great quality of life that draws businesses and people to our communities," said Rachel Beck, vice president of government affairs for the Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce

and EDC. "Sitting in traffic for an extra 20 minutes commuting to and from work has real opportunity and social costs for Colorado Springs families. That time could be much better spent helping our students out with homework, going to the gym, coaching a child's sports team, or enjoying meals around the family dinner table. There also are real costs to business. As businesses consider relocations or corporate expansions, quality roads to efficiently move goods and people rank high in the site selection process. We all lose out when businesses don't choose Colorado for their home."

Five percent of Colorado's bridges are rated in poor/structurally deficient condition. Bridges that are rated poor/structurally deficient have significant deterioration of the bridge deck, supports or other major components. Fifty-four percent of the state's bridges are rated in fair condition and the remaining 40% are in good condition. Most bridges are designed to last 50 years before major overhaul or replacement, although many newer bridges are being designed to last 75 years or longer. In Colorado, 33% of the state's bridges were built in 1969 or earlier.

"Weather, traffic crashes, avalanche mitigation, and a transportation system meant to support 3.5 million residents instead of today's 5.8 million are constant sources of frustration and a huge expense for families and companies located west of the Continental Divide," said Robin Brown, executive director of the Grand Junction Economic Partnership. "For Coloradans on the West Slope, a shutdown of I-70 costs time, money, and resources that we need to survive, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rural areas are in desperate need of safe roads and alternate routes to keep the flow of goods and people at optimal pace and it's time to pass a solution to Colorado's pressing transportation needs."

Traffic crashes in Colorado claimed the lives of 3,030 people from 2015 to 2019. Colorado's overall traffic fatality rate of 1.09 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel in 2019 is slightly lower than the national average of 1.11. Traffic crashes in Colorado imposed a total of \$6.5 billion in economic costs in 2019. TRIP estimates that roadway features, while not the primary cause, were likely a contributing factor in approximately one-third of all fatal traffic crashes, resulting in \$2.2 billion in economic costs in Colorado in 2019.

"The new TRIP report reinforces one simple fact: too many Coloradans are wasting too much of their time and money stuck on congested and potholed roads," said Mike Kopp, president and CEO of Colorado Concern. "We can't encourage our state leaders enough on this point. Don't let our

prosperity get choked off because we can't get our act together and bring about a solution. And the pathway to getting this done is abundantly clear to all, it's through the legislature. The business case for prolonging the problem doesn't exist. It's time for the Colorado Legislature to roll up their sleeves, come to the table, and do the hard work that Colorado families need and deserve."

The efficiency and condition of Colorado's transportation system, particularly its highways, is critical to the health of the state's economy. Approximately 1.1 million full-time jobs in Colorado in key industries like tourism, retail sales, agriculture and manufacturing are dependent on the quality, safety and reliability of the state's transportation infrastructure network.

Annually, \$305 billion in goods are shipped to and from Colorado, relying heavily on the state's network of roads and bridges. The value of freight shipped to and from sites in Colorado, in inflation-adjusted dollars, is expected to increase 82% by 2045 and by 68% for goods shipped by trucks, placing an increased burden on the state's network of roads and bridges.

The TRIP report includes lists of the highway segments in Colorado carrying the greatest number of large commercial trucks daily, and the highway segments where large commercial trucks make up the largest share of daily vehicle travel.

"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," said Dave Kearby, TRIP's executive director. "Without adequate funding, Colorado's transportation system will become increasingly deteriorated and congested, hampering economic growth, safety and quality of life."

"Every year we talk about transportation funding. Every year the situation becomes increasingly dire – costing Coloradans time and money, putting our safety at risk and digging ourselves into a deeper and deeper hole. This year, perhaps more than any other time in the last two decades we have an opportunity to invest in our infrastructure and dig ourselves out of the economic devastation that has accompanied the pandemic," said Tony Milo, executive director of the Colorado Contractors Association. "Today, once again, we applaud the focus on transportation by legislative leaders. More importantly, we also want to emphasize the urgency of the problem. The TRIP report accurately and succinctly describes the demise of transportation in Colorado. If we don't solve the problem, our economic future as a state is at a severe risk. We simply can't afford to do nothing."