

Report: Louisiana's roads cost drivers \$7.6 billion a year

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Louisiana's roads are costing drivers \$7.6 billion a year in extra vehicle operating costs, according to a new report from national transportation nonprofit TRIP, underscoring the need for [infrastructure improvements](#) across the state.

TRIP's report, released Wednesday, estimated that Louisiana's roads cost drivers around \$7.6 billion each year between vehicle operating costs, congestion and crashes. The report said nearly half of the state's major locally and state-maintained roads are in poor or mediocre condition.

"Until the Louisiana Legislature decides to tackle the long-term transportation infrastructure spending, Louisiana will continue to fall behind with the condition of our roads and bridges," said Ken Naquin, CEO of the Louisiana Association of General Contractors, in a press release. "Louisiana is the only Southern state to not have addressed long-term transportation infrastructure spending in the last five years. The only state, and yet we continue to decline in the area of economic growth."



Road work begins Monday at the exit ramps of I-10 at Ambassador. *File Photo*

The report highlights the impact the decrepit infrastructure can have on the state's economic development prospects, particularly with increases in congestion. Congested roads cost Louisiana drivers about \$3 billion each year in lost time and fuel. In the state's largest urban areas, the average driver loses about \$1,312 and 60 hours per year in traffic.

The state's bridges are also of concern, with 13% of the state's bridges being rated poor or structurally deficient. Louisiana has nearly 13,000 bridges across the state, and 33% were built in

1969 or earlier. Most bridges are built to last around 50 years.

From 2015 through 2019, the state has had 3,738 traffic crash fatalities, averaging around 750 per year. About 20% of the total fatalities are pedestrians or bicyclists.

The state's backlog of deferred maintenance has been a hot topic ahead of the state legislature's regular session, which officially began Monday. Shaun Wilson, the secretary of the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, has said the state faces a \$15-billion backlog in road and bridge maintenance and \$13 billion in new projects that have yet to be funded.

There have been discussions about increasing the gas tax to better fund DOTD to cut into the state's maintenance backlog, though Wilson said 2021 [may not be the best time](#) as the state rebounds from COVID-19.

Economic development leaders, such as the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry's President and CEO Stephen Waguespack, have also been in support of increasing support for the state's transportation network.

"It's painfully obvious to any driver who has traveled Louisiana's roads that our state has an endless number of infrastructure needs," Waguespack said in a release. "The condition of our roads and bridges has a real impact on our homegrown companies and ultimately, their bottom line. The business community looks forward to working with Congress, the Legislature,

local governments and other stakeholders to ensure we advance a common-sense solution to address these problems."

TRIP's report also looks at road and bridge conditions in four of the state's high-population areas: New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Shreveport and Lafayette.

In Lafayette, roads cost the average driver about \$2,027 each year, including \$782 in vehicle operating costs, \$738 in congestion, and \$507 in crashes. Around 39% of Lafayette's roads are considered to be poor, with another 23% rated as mediocre.

Lafayette's bridges are generally in better condition than the other major urban areas, though 8% of bridges in the area are rated as poor or structurally deficient. Lafayette has about 439 bridges.

Drivers in Lafayette lose about 32 hours a year to traffic and waste about 17 gallons of fuel in traffic. From 2015 through 2019, Lafayette averaged 36 traffic fatalities per year.

Shreveport's roads cost the average driver around \$2,135 per year, including \$878 in vehicle operating costs, \$694 in traffic congestion, and \$563 in crash costs. Around 45% of roads in Shreveport are considered poor, and another 31% are rated as mediocre.

Around 11% of Shreveport's bridges are poor or structurally deficient. The area has about 969 total bridges.

Shreveport's drivers lose about 28 hours a year due to congestion and waste about 15 gallons of fuel per year. From 2015 through 2019, Shreveport averaged 39 traffic fatalities per year.

Baton Rouge's roads cost the average driver \$2,431 per year, including \$615 in vehicle operating costs, \$1,202 in congestion, and \$614 in crashes. About 26% of Baton Rouge's roads are rated as poor, and another 24% are rated mediocre.

About 20% of bridges in Baton Rouge are considered to be poor or structurally deficient. Baton Rouge has about 616 total bridges.

Baton Rouge's drivers lose about 60 hours a year due to congestion and waste about 26 gallons of fuel per year. From 2015 through 2019, Baton Rouge averaged 68 traffic fatalities per year.

New Orleans' roads cost the average driver \$2,403 per year, including \$685 in vehicle operating costs, \$1,312 in congestion, and \$406 in crashes. About 30% of New Orleans' roads are rated as poor, and another 29% are rated mediocre.

About 11% of bridges in New Orleans are considered to be poor or structurally deficient. New Orleans has about 802 total bridges.

New Orleans' drivers lose about 60 hours a year due to congestion and waste about 26 gallons of fuel per year. From 2015 through 2019, New Orleans averaged 83 traffic fatalities per year.