

The News-Star

FRIDAY, APRIL 16, 2021 | WWW.THENEWSSTAR.COM | PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

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

William Taylor Potter

Lafayette Daily Advertiser
USA TODAY NETWORK | Apr. 14, 2021

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

FRONT PAGE



Tech pitching staff leads nation in total shutouts

SPORTS, 1B

The News-Star

FRIDAY, APRIL 16, 2021 | WWW.THENEWSSTAR.COM | PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK



Louisiana Sen. Sharon Hewitt, R-Slidel, pictured here in a file photo, has authored a bill to extend Louisiana's film tax credit program.

ELIZABETH GARRER/SUN MANSOUR NEWS SERVICE

Hollywood South sequel?

Bill extends Louisiana film tax credits

Greg Hillborn
The News-Star
USA TODAY NETWORK

A bill to expand and extend Louisiana's film tax credit program passed approval from a key committee Thursday as industry advocates said an expansion in the demand for streaming content could help the state return to its Hollywood South glory days.

"Demand for TV and movies and content has exploded," said Sen. Sharon Hewitt, R-Slidel, who authored the bill. Senate Bill 171 even gained bipartisan support from lawmakers like Sen. Jay Landry, D-Alexandria, and Rep. Allan, R-Franklin, who believe regions outside the New Orleans hub reap little benefit from the program.

"I'm going to surprise everybody," said Landry, who made the motion to advance the bill favorably from the Senate Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Committee that Allan chairs.

But that was only after the committee approved Landry's amendment to sunset the program in 2023 rather than 2025 as Hewitt proposed and after Allan made it clear there are more components to come before the bill reaches a



The Netflix drama 'The Highwaymen' films in downtown Shreveport on March 29.

full vote of the Senate. Louisiana burst onto the movie and TV production scene in 2002 by offering lucrative — and unlimited — tax credits. That production plunged in 2015 when the Legislature capped the credits and instituted a convoluted process to cash them in.

Another tweak to the program 2017 led to a resurgence in production that

stalled again in 2020 because of the COVID pandemic.

But now streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, Apple and others are ramping up production in addition to traditional production from studios and networks, testified Troy Barakat, president of the Louisiana Film and

Television Institute.

"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

press release. "Louisiana is the only Southern state to not have addressed long-term transportation infrastructure opening in the last few years. The only state, and yet we continue to decline in the area of economic growth."

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

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.

DOJ OKs new plan to elect West Monroe aldermen

Special to Monroe News-Star
USA TODAY NETWORK

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department announced Thursday that it has entered into a proposed consent decree to settle a voting rights lawsuit with the City of West Monroe.

The Justice Department's lawsuit, brought under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, challenges the current at-large method of electing the West Monroe Board of Aldermen.

Under this agreement, the City of West Monroe will change its method of electing its Board of Aldermen to ensure compliance with the protections of the Voting Rights Act.

The proposed consent decree was filed in federal court in conjunction with a lawsuit brought by the Justice Department.

The department's complaint alleges that the current method of electing the West Monroe Board of Aldermen results in Black citizens in West Monroe having less opportunity than white citizens to participate in the political process and to elect candidates of their choice in violation of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.

Although Black residents comprise nearly 30% of the electorate, no Black candidate has ever been elected to the West Monroe Board of Aldermen.

The complaint does not allege that the current method of election was adopted or maintained with discriminatory intent.

"The Voting Rights Act remains a vital tool to ensure that underrepresented citizens have a fair chance to choose their representatives," said Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Pamela S. Kohn for the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "We appreciate that the City of West Monroe has worked diligently and cooperatively with the department to adopt a solution that provides all the city's citizens with an equal opportunity to participate in the political process and elect aldermen of their choice."

"We join the Civil Rights Division in bringing this important lawsuit under the Voting Rights Act and appreciate that the City of West Monroe has worked with the Justice Department to adopt a solution that brings about fair representation," said Acting U.S. Attorney Alexander C. Van Hook of the Western District of Louisiana.

The department gave notice to the

See DOJ, Page 7A

Report: Roads cost \$7.6 billion a year

William Taylor Potter
Lafayette Daily Advertiser
USA TODAY NETWORK

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 opening in the last few years. The only state, and yet we continue to decline in the area of economic growth."

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

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.

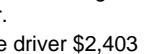
USA TODAY
Statewide dust-up: US health, housing, elections, sections officials, agencies in government hack. 2B

Body of LSU student found in Mississippi River. 3A

Weather
High 67° Low 55°
Stronger 67-74-0200-0000
Forecast. 4A

Volume 92 | No. 103
Home delivery pricing info
Subscriber 977-424-0200
05041

Road work begins Monday at the exit ramps of I-10 at Ambassador, and more.



See ROAD, Page 8A