



The Times

## Long odds

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**SPORTS, 1B**

# Study says road and bridge conditions in Shreveport costing drivers more than \$2K per year

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Roads and bridges that are deteriorated, congested or lack some desirable safety features cost Louisiana motorists a total of \$7.6 billion statewide annually - \$2,135 per driver in the Shreveport urban area - due to higher vehicle operating costs, traffic crashes and congestion-related delays. 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 short- and long-term economic growth in Louisiana, according to a new report released today by TRIP, a Washington, D.C.- based national transportation research nonprofit. The TRIP report, "Louisiana Transportation by the Numbers: Meeting the State's Need for Safe, Smooth and Efficient Mobility," finds that throughout Louisiana, nearly half of major locally and state-maintained roads are in poor or mediocre condition, 13% of locally and state-maintained bridges (20 feet or more in length) are rated poor/structurally deficient, and more than 3,700 people lost their lives on the state's roads from 2015-2019. Louisiana's major urban roads are congested, causing significant delays and choking commuting and commerce.

Driving on roads in the Shreveport urban area costs the average driver \$2,135 per year in the form of extra vehicle operating costs (VOC) as a result of driving on roads in need of repair, lost time and fuel due to congestion-related delays, and the costs of traffic crashes in which the lack of adequate roadway features, while not the primary cause, likely were a contributing factor. The report includes regional pavement and bridge conditions, a list of the most congested corridors, highway safety data, and cost breakdowns for the Baton Rouge, Lafayette, New Orleans and Shreveport urban areas and statewide. A breakdown of the costs per motorist in the state's largest urban areas, along with a statewide total, is below.

The TRIP report finds that 45% of major locally and state-maintained roads in the Shreveport urban area are in poor condition and another 31 percent are in mediocre condition, costing the average motorist an additional \$878 each year in extra vehicle operating costs, including accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs, and increased fuel consumption and tire wear. Statewide, 25% of Louisiana's major roads are in poor condition and 22% are in mediocre condition.

"It's painfully obvious to any driver who has traveled Louisiana's roads that our state has an endless number of infrastructure needs," said Stephen Waguespack, president and CEO of the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI). "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."

In the Shreveport urban area, 11% of bridges are rated poor/structurally deficient, with significant deterioration to the bridge deck, supports or other major components. Statewide, 13% of Louisiana's bridges are rated poor/structurally deficient, the seventh-highest share in the nation. Thirty-nine percent of the state's bridges are rated in fair condition and the remaining 48% are rated good.

Traffic crashes in Louisiana claimed the lives of 3,738 people from 2015 to 2019, 20 percent of whom were pedestrians or bicyclists. Louisiana's overall traffic fatality rate of 1.42 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel in 2019 is higher than the national average of 1.11 and the eighth highest in the U.S. In the Shreveport urban area, on average, 49 people were killed in traffic crashes each year from 2015 to 2019. The financial impact of traffic crashes in which the lack of adequate roadway safety features, while not the primary cause, were likely a contributing factor was an average of \$563 annually per each Shreveport area driver.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, vehicle travel in Louisiana dropped by as much as 36 percent in April 2020 (as compared to vehicle travel during the same month the previous year), but rebounded to six percent below the previous year's volume in January 2021. Traffic congestion in the Shreveport urban area causes 28 annual hours of delay and 15 gallons of wasted fuel for the average motorist, costing the average Shreveport driver \$694 annually in lost time and wasted fuel. Statewide, drivers lose \$3 billion annually as a result of lost time and wasted fuel due to traffic congestion.

The efficiency and condition of Louisiana's transportation system, particularly its highways, is critical to the health of the state's economy. Annually, \$584 billion in goods are shipped to and from Louisiana, relying heavily on the state's network of roads and bridges. Increasingly, companies are looking at the quality of a region's transportation system when deciding where to re-locate or expand. Regions with congested or poorly maintained roads may see businesses relocate to areas with a smoother, more efficient and more modern transportation system.

"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, Louisiana's transportation system will become increasingly deteriorated and congested, hampering economic growth, safety and quality of life."