OVERDRIVE

States with the worst traffic and highways, ranked

Overdrive Staff | Jun 24, 2021

Traffic on the interstate highway system dropped 45% during the initial stages of COVID -19, but has since returned almost to pre-pandemic levels.

Any driver who spends enough time on the interstate highway system can speculate about which cities and states have the worst traffic and road conditions, but a recent report from TRIP, a nonprofit that researches transportation trends and needs, reveals its calculation of the worst offenders.

TRIP's report, released Tuesday, coincides with the 65th birthday of America's interstate highway system, concluding that it direly needs repair and investment. The report comes as a national debate over interstate funding rages and the freight market runs hotter than ever before.

RANK	Congested Urban Interstates		2000-19 Interstate VMT Increase		Daily Interstate Travel per Lane Mile		Interstate Pavement in Poor Condition		Interstate Bridges Poor/Structurally Deficient	
1	California	87%	Nevada	69%	California	20,957	Hawaii	23%	West Virginia	13%
2	Maryland	83%	Louisiana	61%	Maryland	20,214	Delaware	9%	Rhode Island	12%
3	New Jersey	81%	North Carolina	57%	Hawaii	17,864	New Jersey	9%	Illinois	8%
4	Delaware	71%	Utah	57%	Colorado	17,702	Louisiana	7%	Massachusetts	7%
5	Florida	70%	Colorado	53%	Florida	17,145	New York	6%	New York	6%
6	Massachusetts	68%	Texas	49%	Texas	17,123	Colorado	6%	Michigan	6%
7	Rhode Island	65%	Mississippi	45%	Rhode Island	16,644	Michigan	6%	Colorado	5%
8	Connecticut	63%	Idaho	44%	Massachusetts	16,326	California	6%	Maine	5%
9	Hawaii	60%	Wisconsin	42%	Washington	16,251	Maryland	5%	Washington	5%
10	Washington	58%	Florida	41%	New Jersey	16,053	Indiana	5%	Missouri	5%
11	Texas	58%	North Dakota	41%	Delaware	15,956	Pennsylvania	5%	Idaho	4%
12	Georgia	57%	South Carolina	39%	Connecticut	15,514	Washington	5%	Pennsylvania	4%
13	Colorado	57%	New Jersey	36%	Georgia	15,325	South Carolina	4%	Wyoming	3%
14	Minnesota	56%	Arkansas	35%	Virginia	15,207	Arkansas	4%	Montana	3%
15	New Hampshire	54%	Montana	34%	Nevada	15,130	Illinois	4%	Louisiana	3%
16	Virginia	52%	Alabama	33%	Arizona	15,016	Oklahoma	4%	California	3%
17	Kentucky	51%	Tennessee	33%	Tennessee	14,718	Minnesota	4%	Connecticut	3%
18	South Carolina	50%	South Dakota	30%	Louisiana	14,452	Alabama	4%	New Mexico	3%
19	Utah	49%	Iowa	27%	Kentucky	14,404	Ohio	3%	New Jersey	3%
20	Ohio	48%	Kentucky	26%	Minnesota	14,236	West Virginia	3%	North Carolina	3%
	U.S Average	47%	U.S Average	26%	U.S Average	14,742	U.S Average	3%	U.S Average	3%

The chart above ranks states whose Interstate systems are the most congested, have experienced the greatest increase in vehicle miles of travel (VMT) since 2000, are busiest (based on daily travel per lane mile), have the

largest share of pavement in poor condition, and have the greatest share of bridges in poor/structurally deficient condition. Source: TRIP

"Our rapidly deteriorating infrastructure is a clear and present danger to our nation's supply chain. Breakdowns in the Interstate Highway System add an annual $75 billion to the cost of freight transportation, and 67 million tons of excess carbon dioxide emissions are released into the atmosphere every year from trucks stuck in traffic congestion," Chris Spear, president and CEO of the American Trucking Associations said in a statement on TRIP's report. "This report quantifies how severe this crisis has become, and it underscores the urgent need for Congress to make real infrastructure investments that are backed by a fair and equitable user-based revenue source."

The report is based largely on the findings of a 2019 report prepared by the Transportation Research Board at the request of Congress. TRB is part of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. Here's what the report said about America's highways in 2021:

Traffic is back

"During the initial stages of the COVID pandemic, we saw a 45% drop in overall vehicle travel on the nation's interstate highway system, but by this April vehicle travel on the interstate highway system is only 6% below pre-pandemic levels," the report said.

In other words, the pandemic-induced holiday from heavy traffic is mostly over.

States with the worst traffic

California, Maryland, New Jersey, Delaware, and Florida have the worst congestion. California's congestion rate is 40 percentage points higher than the national average of 47%.

States with the worst-paved highways

Thankfully, the state with the most extreme percentage of poor roads isn't one an OTR hauler can visit. Hawaii has 23% of its interstate highway pavement in "poor" condition, according to the report. This runs 20 percentage points higher than the national average of 3%.

Delaware, New Jersey, Louisiana, and New York make up the rest of the top five, though they range from 9% to 6% of interstate pavement in "poor" condition.

Highway design is saving lives

Despite concerns over ailing infrastructure, the TRIP report says that years of certain highway improvements have mostly worked to reduce fatalities.

The report says safety features like the separation from other roads and rail lines, a minimum of four lanes, paved shoulders and median barriers make interstates more than twice as safe as all other roadways.

"The fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles of travel on the Interstate in 2019 was 0.55, compared to 1.30 on non-Interstate routes. TRIP estimates that additional safety features on the Interstate Highway System saved 6,555 lives in 2019," the report said.