

Rush hour traffic costs you time and money

FRONT PAGE

Report states that OK commuters may be losing 50 hours, \$800 a year

Jessie Christopher Smith | The Oklahoman | USA TODAY NETWORK



Afternoon rush hour begins Wednesday on north bound Interstate 235 near NW 36, the most congested highway section in Oklahoma City during the late rush hour, according to a recent report. *DOUG HOKE/THE OKLAHOMAN*

Finding yourself stuck frequently in Oklahoma City traffic on the interstate might be costing you 50 hours and \$800 a year, according to a new transportation report.

TRIP, a Washington-based transportation research group, estimated that congestion in Oklahoma's metropolitan areas costs state residents \$1.5 billion a year because of lost time and fuel.

Drivers in the Oklahoma City area lose an average of \$842 and 50 hours a year from interstate traffic congestion, the report says. Tulsa drivers are not far behind, losing an annual average of 46 hours and \$732.

"The Texas (A&M) Transportation Institute does an annual report on traffic congestion, and we take those numbers," said Rocky Moretti, TRIP's director of research and policy who authored the report. "It's essentially saying that for someone who's a regular commuter traveling during rush hour, they estimate that this is the additional time lost, and then they put a value on the time you lose and on the fuel you're losing, so they monetize that."

"We definitely avoid I-40 at all costs."

Jason Dillis, Division director of information technology at Mosaic Personnel in Oklahoma City

Avoiding the worst spots

Traffic jams and bottlenecks are frequently caused by road conditions, highway construction and automobile accidents, which then result in slower speeds and longer travel times.

Jason Dillis, division director of information technology at Mosaic Personnel in Oklahoma City, often returns home after picking up his children from daycare by taking a route that avoids Interstate 40. He said it sometimes adds 40 minutes to his travel time. "We definitely avoid I-40 at all costs," Dillis said. "That's a nightmare that we recognize, so we intentionally avoid anything on that side of town for the traffic alone."

"I think we got used to, during the pandemic, everyone staying home, so obviously traffic was a breeze," Dillis said. "Going anywhere there was no traffic at all. I think it's just picked back up, and that's the reason I avoid I-40."

The most congested traffic areas in the state are various places along Interstate 35, I-40, Interstate 44 and Interstate 235.

In the evenings, traffic congestion is highest on I-235 going northbound and southbound between NE 23 and I-44; and I-40 westbound from Pennsylvania Avenue to I-44.

Traffic returns as pandemic wanes

Moretti's research shows that pre-pandemic levels of traffic are returning to evening peak periods but not to mornings — at least, not yet.

"There does seem to be a sense of pent-up demand in terms of trips people would like to take," Moretti said. "Obviously we're coming into the summer months, so consumer behavior might also result in some additional traffic, and economic growth that was impacted by COVID-19 is bouncing back across the country."

Since the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act was signed into law in 2016, Oklahoma has received from the federal government an average of \$676 million annually to improve and repair its roads.

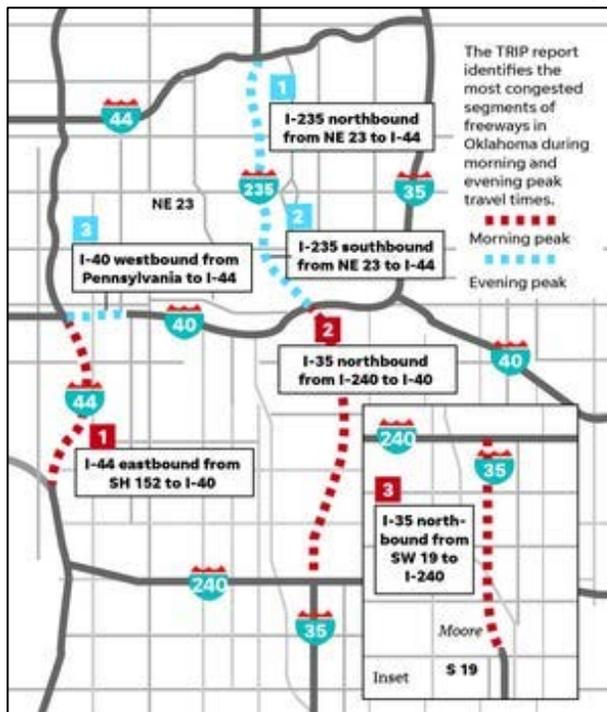
The program was originally slated to expire in September of 2020, but Congress extended the legislation by a year.

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation shared a statement with The Oklahoman in response to the TRIP report, saying that the issues of urban traffic congestion, pavement conditions and rural two-lane highways with deficient shoulders "cannot be solved overnight."

"Adequate and sustained state and federal funding will be necessary as ODOT continues to make much-needed improvements to the highway system, especially with recent harsh winters accelerating the deterioration of older and already stressed pavements and as the state's population and economy continue to grow," the statement read.

Oklahoma's traffic fatality rate is ranked eighth in the United States, with 1.43 deaths for every 100 vehicle miles traveled, according to the National Highway Safety Administration.

"It's important that, whatever federal surface transportation program that is reauthorized, it also contain the flexibility needed in Oklahoma so that the state and the regional governments can take that funding and use it on the types of projects that are most critically needed," Moretti said.



In the mornings, Oklahoma City area motorists should expect traffic snarls going eastbound on I-44 from State Highway 152 to I-40; I-35 northbound from I-240 to I-40; and I-35 northbound from SW 19 in Moore to I-240.



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TRANSPORTATION



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DOUG HOKKI/
THE OKLAHOMAN

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Federal Reserve sees faster time frame for rate hikes as inflation rises

Christopher Ruggaber
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The Federal Reserve signaled Wednesday that it may act sooner than previously planned to start dialing back the low-interest-rate policies that have helped fuel a swift rebound from the pandemic recession but also have coincided with rising inflation.

The Fed's policymakers forecast that they would raise their benchmark short-term rate — which affects many consum-

ers and business rates, from mortgages to auto loans — twice by late 2023. They had previously estimated that no rate hike would occur before 2024.

But at a news conference after its latest policy meeting, Chair Jerome Powell sought to dispel any concerns that the Fed might be in a hurry to withdraw its economic support by making borrowing more expensive. The economy, Powell said, still hasn't improved enough for the Fed to reduce the pace of its monthly purchases of Treasury and mortgage

bonds. Those purchases have been intended to hold down long-term loan rates to encourage borrowing.

The Fed has said it will keep buying \$20 billion a month in bonds until "substantial further progress" has been made toward its goals of maximum employment and inflation sustainably above 2%.

"We see a ways away from substantial further progress, we think," Powell said

See **INFLATION**, Page 3A

Testimony starts in runners' deaths

Did pickup driver speed up by teens or pass out?

Nolan Clay The Oklahoman
USA TODAY NETWORK

NORMAN — The first exhibit in the murder trial over last year's Moore High School tragedy was Rachel Freeman's senior picture.

The 17-year-old cross country runner was killed immediately when she was hit from behind by a red Ford pickup during a cool-down run on Feb. 3, 2020, on a sidewalk outside the school.

The second exhibit was a photo of sophomore Yuridia Martinez, 16, holding a volleyball. She, too, was hit from behind and died the next day.

The third exhibit was a photo of

See **RUNNERS**, Page 2A



Defendant Max Leroy Townsend is escorted from court by a Cleveland County sheriff's deputy after jury selection was completed Wednesday.
CHRIS LANGENBERGER/THE OKLAHOMAN

Construction set to start on downtown apartments

371 units to be priced for workforce housing

Steve Lackmeyer The Oklahoman
USA TODAY NETWORK

Downtown Oklahoma City development is picking up where it left off at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic with construction set to start on three mixed-use apartment and retail projects.

Once completed, the projects will add 371 apartments priced for workforce housing as market rate rents spiral downward.

John Semtner, representing Alley's End and Boulevard Place, and Ron Bradshaw, who is developing 700 West, both indicated Wednesday they are ready to proceed despite sharp nationwide increases in steel and labor prices and worker shortages.

"Steel and lumber prices right now are fluctuating significantly," Semtner said. "Lumber has started to come down and steady. But it's still three times what it was when this started."

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USA TODAY

Meeting: Biden, Putin discuss cybersecurity, ambassadors in first presidential meeting. **9A**

Annual convention

Southern Baptists vote to debate sex abuse investigation. **10A**

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