

Report shows funds for SC roads needs examining

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GREENVILLE, SC (FOX Carolina) – South Carolina is still facing challenges maintaining its aging transportation system and reliably accommodating growing passenger and freight traffic to serve the state's growing economy, according to a [new report](#) released Wednesday by TRIP, a Washington, DC based national transportation research nonprofit.

This new research comes after an increase in transportation funding provided by the state's legislature passing the 2017 Roads Bill.

The report examines the condition, use, safety and efficiency of South Carolina's surface transportation system, the impact of the bill, the importance of reauthorization of the federal surface transportation program and the challenges the state faces to accommodate future transportation growth and sustain adequate funding.

"Act 40 has been a game-changer for our state, and every county is benefitting from this investment. Since 2017, considerable progress has been made to improve our state-owned roads. South Carolina is in the midst of tackling a monumental task, and unfortunately, we cannot press pause while we play catch-up on these long-overdue repairs. While current funding levels will help get us to a state of good repair, South Carolina is unprepared to financially deal with the immediate demands associated with population growth and continued economic development," said Jennifer Patterson, Executive Director, SC Alliance to Fix Our Roads.

The state's population is expected to grow to approximately 6.4 million people by 2040 and vehicle travel growing at the fifth highest rate in the nation from 2014 to 2019, according to the report. The report shows that congestion is worsening, costing South Carolina drivers \$2.1 billion each year in the form of lost time and

wasteful fuel, an average of \$615 per driver in the Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson Metro area.

The average driver in the Metro area loses 26 hours and wastes 12 gallons of fuel annually because of congestion. Two of the 10 most congested interstate segments in the state are in the GSA Metro area.

Annually, 465 tons of freight are shipped to, from or through South Carolina, an amount that is anticipated to grow by 65-percent by 2040. Accommodating the significant increase expected in the movement of truck and freight in South Carolina will be further challenged by the significant number of freight routes in the state that are constrained because they have inadequate load carrying capacity to accommodate large trucks.

"Interstate 26 is the state's economic lifeline and truly the most SC-centric Interstate corridor in the state. It has enabled the development and growth of our international, domestic, and tourism sectors like no other route. But when other modes fail, or I-26 bogs down, everything and everybody do too. To remain competitive, I-26, like all of our public infrastructure, must be improved, expanded, and modernized. The state and federal governments have dedicated funding for deepening South Carolina's shipping highway – the Charleston Harbor – they can do the same for I-26," said Rick Todd, President & CEO, SC Trucking Association.

The South Carolina Department of Transportation has been able to start approximately 4,000 miles of paving projects statewide since 2018, partly due to the additional funding provided by ACT 40. According to the report, in the GSA Metro urban area, 20-percent of major locally and state-maintained roads are in poor condition and 28-percent are in mediocre condition.

Eighteen percent of major roads are in fair condition and the remaining 3-percent are in good condition.

In the GSA Metro urban area, seven percent of locally and state-maintained bridges are rated poor/structurally deficient. A bridge is deemed poor/structurally deficient if there is significant deterioration of the bridge deck, supports or other major components. Bridges that are poor/structurally deficient may be posted for lower weight limits or closed if their condition warrants such action.

Statewide, eight percent of South Carolina's locally and state-maintained bridges are rated poor/structurally deficient. Since 2018, the department has begun repairs on 211 of the 465 state-maintained bridges that were in poor condition or restricted to carrying lighter weight vehicles and prioritized by the department for repair. Based on current funding, the department anticipates that the number of state-maintained bridges that are either in poor condition or restricted to carrying lighter weight vehicles will increase by 81 percent by 2040, from 548 to 994.

"Noticeable progress has been made since passage of Act 40 to enhance safety and address road repairs. Agriculture and forestry businesses are dependent upon the state's rural transportation network to connect these agribusinesses to their markets and ultimately the consumer. Bridges are key connectors for our supply chain, and additional investments at the federal and state level are necessary to ensure that our bridges receive necessary upgrades and repairs," said Ronnie Summers, CEO, Palmetto Agribusiness Council.

Traffic crashes in South Carolina claimed the lives of 5,018 people from 2015 to 2019. South Carolina's overall traffic fatality rate of 1.73 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel in 2019 is the highest in the U.S. The fatality rate on South Carolina's non-Interstate rural roads in 2019 was also the highest rate in the country and approximately three-and-a-half times higher than all other roads in the state (3.46 per 100 million vehicle miles of travel vs. 0.98).

The department has initiated a rural roads safety program targeting 1,957 miles of rural roads, which represents approximately five percent of the state's rural roads, but account for approximately 30 percent of the state's rural fatal and serious traffic crashes. Since passage of Act 40, safety improvements have been initiated on 635 miles of the 1,000 miles of rural roads to be addressed under the state's current 10-year plan. These improvements include the addition of rumble strips, guardrails, raised pavement markers, paved shoulders and wider clear zones.