

The worst U.S. bottleneck for trucks is in N.J., and it's slowing delivery of your stuff

Tuesday, December 14, 2021



A report says the approach to the bridge where I-95 meets Route 4 is the worst traffic bottleneck for trucks in the nation in 2021. Pictured here is an AP file photo from April 2019 showing vehicles on the right approaching the George Washington Bridge toll plaza in Fort Lee, N.J. AP

By [Larry Higgs | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com](#)

It's bad enough for holiday shoppers that scores of container ships full of holiday gifts and other stuff are waiting off the Port of Long Beach in California. But for truckers and the goods they haul, a similar black hole of traffic backups is taking place right here in Jersey.

The Garden State [is number one, again, for the worst truck traffic bottleneck](#) in America on I-95 at Route 4 in Fort Lee, the gateway to and from the George Washington Bridge, according to ["The U.S. Freight Network's Critical Role in the Supply Chain,"](#) an annual report by [TRIP](#), a national non-profit transportation research group.

Drivers are going nowhere fast in this section of highway — where the average speed ranges from 30 mph to 39 mph when it's moving, the report said.

The New Jersey bottleneck tops a list of the nation's 100 worst, according to the American Transportation Research Institute's (ATRI) [annual list](#) of the top 100 truck bottlenecks in the nation. It also comes at a time when there is a global focus on the supply chain — ranging from ships to trains to trucks — bringing goods and groceries to store shelves.

Another similar South Jersey bottleneck made the worst 100 — the junction of I-76 at I-676 in Gloucester City that leads to the Walt Whitman Bridge to and from Philadelphia. Average speeds are better than the GWB, averaging in the 40 mph range.

What does it mean to you? That despite the best efforts of truck drivers, from those driving 18-wheelers to the delivery van on your street, traffic affects timely shipments, from food to the grocery store to Christmas gifts for your kids.

"In the short term, improving the performance of the nation's supply chain will require addressing the many supply chain challenges that are restricting the timely movement of freight,"

said Dave Kearby, TRIP executive director. "Ensuring that the nation's long-term goals for economic growth and quality of life are met will require investing adequately in an efficient transportation system that will provide the U.S. with a reliable supply chain."

What makes it that way? A number of factors.

Work continues on the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey's \$2 billion ["Restore the George" 10-year project](#) to rehabilitate and [replace key elements of the 90-year-old George Washington Bridge](#). The bridge is the only route to New York for large and oversized trucks that can't use the Lincoln or Holland Tunnels. The GWB project is scheduled to be completed in 2026.

The George Washington Bridge moves the highest number of trucks of any of the six Port Authority bridges and tunnels, more than 310,000 trucks each month of 2021, according to agency traffic statistics.

The bridge is also part of one of the busiest sections of the I-95 corridor between Richmond, Virginia and New Haven, Connecticut, ranked the number one freight corridor in the nation.

"Highway bottlenecks cost the trucking industry more than \$75 billion each year, contributing to the recent surge in inflation and driving down supply chain efficiencies," said Bill Sullivan, American Trucking Association executive vice president of advocacy. "The TRIP report provides some of the starkest evidence yet of the dire consequences of underinvestment in our nation's most critical infrastructure."

Late deliveries can have costly ripple effects and disruptions in the production process, the report said. Decreased reliability also requires truck drivers to budget extra time, track routes in real time and make route adjustments to compensate for inconsistent travel times and delays, TRIP determined.

That comes at time when qualified drivers with the correct [commercial drivers license are in short supply](#) and high demand. [Concerns were raised in May about a shortage of tank truck drivers](#) when the Colonial Pipeline shut down due to a cyber attack.

But this year, as opposed to past reports, officials are sounding an optimistic note because of an anticipated increase in highway and bridge construction due to the Biden administration infrastructure bill.

"With passage of the bipartisan Infrastructure legislation, new federal resources will join with state, local and private partners to modernize the freight network in a one-in-a-generational opportunity to rebuild and innovate, ensuring America's competitiveness long into the 21st century," said Ed Mortimer, U.S. Chamber of Commerce vice president of transportation infrastructure. "It's time to get to work."

Please subscribe now and support the local journalism you rely on and trust.

Larry Higgs may be reached at lhiggs@njadvancemedia.com.