

Deficient roads cost Utica drivers more than \$1,200 a year, but conditions are improving



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Deficient roads in Utica cost drivers \$1,253 annually, according to a report from a Washington, DC-based nonprofit.

TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit, determined the impact of vehicle operating costs, safety and congestion in eight metros in New York state, along with Jersey City and Newark. All told, the state's drivers feel a \$28 billion impact from deficient roads.



A view of damage to the surface of Shaw Street, east of Sunset Avenue in Utica. *STEVEN HOWE / OBSERVER-DISPATCH*

In Utica, the individual cost broke down to \$313 for vehicle operating costs, \$558 in safety and \$382 in congestion. The TRIP report found Utica's costs were lower than each of the other metros, aside from Binghamton.

The report also found roads in Utica to be in better condition than other upstate metros. Only 7% of Utica roads were rated in poor condition, compared to 32% in Syracuse and 12% in Rochester.

Utica bridges had the largest spread of results, with 10% rated as poor or structurally deficient, the third highest share in the state, but 43% were rated in good condition, the second highest share in the state.

The TRIP report found Utica was near the bottom in the state regarding hours lost to congestion and average fatalities, based on data from 2015-19.

Costs to drivers have actually declined in Utica when compared to the same TRIP report in 2016. That year, the nonprofit found deficient roads in Utica cost drivers \$1,518 per year.

In November 2016, voters passed a referendum requiring the city to spend \$5 million per year on road repairs as part of a 15-year plan to repave all of Utica's roads. The annual cost is split between \$2.5 million in state and federal funds and \$2.5 million in bonds paid over a 15-year term.

The city reduced its spending on street repairs early in the COVID-19 pandemic, approving just \$3 million in 2020-21.

During the current year, however, the city allocated more than \$8.2 million, including \$2 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act monies, for paving. The stimulus money was used for paving as "revenue recovery," said Heather Mowat, the city's budget director, at the Dec. 15 meeting.

The Common Council also approved a paving reserve fund of \$750,000 at the same December meeting to free additional funds for street repair. The fund can only be used for street repairs and requires council approval to be spent.

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