

# THE NEWS-ENTERPRISE

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## Report says poor road conditions cost drivers time, money

By JAMES MAYSE MESSENGER-INQUIRER

Officials from organizations like the Kentucky Association of Counties and the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce said a report on the condition of the state's roads shows a need for more funding to improve roads and bridges.

The report was released last week by TRIP, a private nonprofit organization that says it "promotes transportation policies that help relieve traffic congestion and its impact on air quality, improve road and bridge conditions, make surface travel safer and enhance economic productivity."

Jennifer Kirchner, executive director of Kentuckians for Better Transportation, said, "Kentuckians are paying thousands of dollars every year for insufficient infrastructure."

To raise more funding for road projects, she said state lawmakers should consider raising the state's gasoline tax and look at the possibility of creating a "user fee" for drivers of electric cars.

Rocky Moretti, director of policy and research for TRIP, said the agency's findings are based on data from the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, the Federal Highway Administration and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

The report rated roads and highways as being in "good," "fair," "mediocre" or "poor" condition. TRIP rated 19% of the roads and highways in the Owensboro area as being "poor," meaning they have "a noticeable reduction in ride quality" and show signs of deteriorating, such as potholes or cracking.

The report said 29% of the Owensboro area's roads were "mediocre," which means the roads have "intermittent reductions in ride quality" and some deterioration, but do not need major work.

Overall, 7% of the state's roads are in "poor" condition and 21% are in "fair condition," according to the report.

Road conditions cost state motorists \$4.7 billion annually in vehicle maintenance costs, lost time, wasted fuel while stopped in congested traffic and in costs from vehicle crashes that might have been mitigated by road safety features, the report says.

"Kentucky has the fourth-highest traffic fatality rate in the country," Moretti said. "We do know when road safety features are provided, we do see a significant improvement in road safety. The traffic agencies at the state and local level need to have the resources available" to install safety features.

The state has a \$900 million shortfall in highway funding, Moretti said.

John Cox, director of public affairs for the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, said roads affect business' efforts to hire and retain skilled workers.

"Limited access to transportation and limited roads can be a serious barrier," for employees and potential workers, he said. For the state to compete for business and industry, "we must invest in our transportation infrastructure, or we are going to be left behind."

Frank Jemley III, executive director for the Kentucky Association of Manufacturers, said economic development depends "on reliable, safe, robust roads, bridges and highways."

"We urge state, local and federal policy makers to consider (the TRIP report) and prioritize Kentucky's transportation issues very highly," he said.