

FRIDAY, APRIL 15, 2022

Not fixing bad roads costs Michigan households nearly \$5,000 a year, report finds



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Politics and policy



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Poor road conditions in Michigan cause families to pay an average of \$4,845 annually through more frequent vehicle repairs, crashes and decreased productivity from traffic delays and congestion, according to a new report.

Another form of inflation is set to hit Michigan business owners and motorists in the wallet in the coming years — and it was avoidable. Chronically underfunding and under-maintaining roads leads to higher annual expenses for maintaining and repairing vehicles in Michigan. And the bill for the average Michigan motorist — already one of the nation's highest — is about to rise exponentially.

A new study from TRIP, a Washington, D.C., transportation research nonprofit, pegs the annual cost of bad roads for Michigan families at \$4,845 annually (presumably more for businesses with vehicle fleets) through more frequent vehicle repairs, crashes and decreased productivity from traffic delays and congestion.

[TRIP's study](#) found that based on Michigan's current taxpayer investment in roads and infrastructure, those annual household costs will rise by nearly 30 percent to \$6,273 over the next 10 years — from \$403 per month to nearly \$523.

That's the cost of status quo funding for transportation infrastructure because Michigan's roads and bridges are deteriorating faster than construction companies can repave them with available funds appropriated by the Legislature, according to a recent [Crain's Forum report](#) on road conditions.

Without new and sustained investment in transportation infrastructure, a wave of roads currently in fair condition is going to effectively disintegrate in the coming years, according to the TRIP analysis, which is based on pavement condition projections from local road agencies and the Michigan Department of Transportation.

The percentage of roads in poor condition is forecast to more than double from 24 percent to 49 percent in 2031, TRIP's report says. In Michigan, one in nine bridges — or 11 percent — are rated as structurally deficient, a civil engineering term that stops just short of calling them dangerous. TRIP projects the number of structurally

deficient bridges will increase by 58 percent if taxpayer funding for bridges remains stagnant.

The TRIP report lays out a scenario in which Michigan makes a "significant improvement" in the near-term and long-term condition of roads and bridges that could bring down the annual cost of bad roads to \$2,479 for every Michigan household — effectively cutting the price of deficient roads for users in half.

"I think the conclusion is if we invest we can actually save money and not have those costly repairs," said Lance Bioniemi, vice president of government affairs at the Michigan Infrastructure & Transportation Association, or MITA.

The TRIP report is just the latest in a long succession of reports from transportation experts that have warned for years that Michigan is so far in the hole in chronically underfunding its roads that it will be hard to ever dig our way out. Somewhere in Lansing there's a whole bookshelf of reports about road conditions and funding shortfalls that are gathering dust.

To be clear, TRIP is a think tank organization that gets its funding from auto insurance companies, the automotive sector, road construction businesses, their labor unions and advocacy groups that are pro-good pavement, such as MITA.

The organization's funders have a dog in this fight. But so do Michigan drivers who endure some of America's worst roads and end up paying the repair bill.

Motorists in other states pay a fraction of what Michigan vehicle owners shell out annually for car repairs, crashes and lost time in traffic congestion, according to TRIP reports.

Drivers in Louisville, Ky., pay \$1,884 per year, according to a February TRIP [report](#).

In metropolitan Charlotte, N.C., a region with which Southeast Michigan competes for talent and treasure, TRIP [reports](#) the annual price for bad roads is \$1,976 per vehicle — less than half of what a metro Detroit resident would shell out for the privilege of driving down the crater-filled 10 Mile Road in southeast Oakland County.

In Kansas City and St. Louis, the annual added cost per driver for deficient roads in Missouri is \$1,873 and \$1,917, respectively, according to [TRIP](#).

Bioniemi, the lobbyist for road builders, said Michigan motorists are so accustomed to pockmarked roads that they've almost become numb to a jarring repair bill for a bent rim and front-end realignment.

"We just take for granted when we have to replace tires because of a pothole or our struts get worn out after a couple of years when they're supposed to last four or five (years)," he said.

The [grim long-term outlook](#) on Michigan's roads comes after the state Legislature's 2015 plan to boost annual spending on roads by \$1.2 billion was just completed last year. The Republican-controlled Legislature, which controls the purse strings, has taken no action since late 2015 to make additional long-term investments in roads and bridges — just a series of [one-time Band-Aids](#).

The TRIP report accounts for the impact of Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's [\\$3.5 billion bonding program](#) to rebuild [dozens of freeway sections](#) across the state and additional [\\$378 million Michigan will receive](#) annually for the next five years from the federal government as part of President Joe Biden's \$1 trillion infrastructure bill.

Wendy Block, vice president of business advocacy and member engagement at the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, said the report shows lawmakers must put more taxpayer resources into infrastructure before the roads further deteriorate.

"It's more clear than ever that we can't be complacent and think that this problem is somehow behind us or solved and take our foot off the proverbial pedal," Block said.