



Transportation experts identify Montana's transportation challenges

by Michael Santoscoy | Wednesday, January 18, 2023



Transportation experts reveal their findings on Montana's transportation network, and identify the state's transportation challenges. (Photo: MDT road camera)

BOZEMAN, Mont. — Officials from TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit, held a virtual news conference Wednesday to reveal their findings on Montana's transportation network and identify the state's transportation challenges.

Their new report shows 13% of major roadways in Montana have pavement in poor condition, another 17% in mediocre condition.

The cities with the worst conditions are Billings at 32%, Great Falls at 31% and Missoula at 29%.

Your wallet can take a hit from driving on deteriorated roads -- the average Montana driver spends an extra \$526 a year in vehicle operating costs, for a total of \$427 million.

Experts said the heavy amount of travel to larger urban areas in Montana is worsening poor pavement conditions.

"What we're seeing is that as roadways age that we see a diminishing return, a simple repaving doesn't last as long as it once did in the past, because unfortunately, the substructure, the base of the roadways are beginning through age to crumble," said Rocky Moretti, director of policy and research for TRIP.

Projects are constantly underway or being planned to make necessary road, bridge and highway improvements. However, some of the ongoing projects are funded while others still need funding.

Major roadwork can cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

The solution -- prioritizing what needs to be done first and maintaining roads and bridges to prevent worsening conditions.

"We did get a fuel tax increase, and it helps us and we're using it trying to put it out on the roadway. But we're always balancing our maintenance needs and our future needs," said Malcolm Long, Montana Department of Transportation director.

NBC Montana will continue tracking more information on the growth of travel in Montana and goals to improve road safety. We'll have another report with those details on Thursday.