

# As traffic clogs Wilmington, study cites nearly half of city roads below average

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A number of roads in Wilmington were deemed subpar, according to a nonprofit group out of Washington, D.C. studying transportation. STARNEWS FILE PHOTO

Back in 2012, the North Carolina Chamber predicted the Tar Heel State would add 3 million people to its population by 2030. "Well, guess what? They're here, and they're continuing to come," Gary Salamido, president and CEO of the state commerce group said Wednesday during a virtual news conference.

This means more vehicles and traffic on the road, especially in the Wilmington area. It's the reason, Salamido said, that infrastructure and transportation improvements are important throughout the state.

According to the "Moving North Carolina Forward" report from [TRIP](#), a national transportation research nonprofit based in Washington, D.C., North Carolina's ability to keep up with growing transportation needs is threatened by the reduced purchasing power of motor fuel tax revenues due to inflation, improved vehicle fuel efficiency, and the adoption of hybrid and electric vehicles. All of those worries linger, despite state and federal funding going towards the transportation system.

The [report](#) shows that one-third of major roads in North Carolina are in poor or mediocre condition. Researchers also found that 7% of bridges (20 feet or more in length) are rated with poor/structurally deficient conditions. Some of the other findings included traffic increases impeding personal and commercial mobility, and traffic fatality rates going up from 2019 to 2021.

Here's what the report showed for the Wilmington area.

## Bumps in the road or bank account Wasting time and money

According to the report, 41% percent of major roads in the Wilmington area are in poor or mediocre condition.

As a result, it's costing the average driver \$544 annually in extra vehicle operating costs, which is about \$60 more compared to the state average. This includes accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs, and increased fuel consumption and tire wear.

## Bridging the gap

Three percent of bridges in the Wilmington area are in poor/structurally deficient condition, with significant deterioration to the bridge deck, supports or other major components.

"We are a county surrounded by bodies of water, which requires bridges to keep us connected to the mainland, all of which require regular maintenance and upkeep," stated Natalie English, president and CEO of the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce. "The Cape Fear Memorial Bridge (CFMB), which is beyond its 50-year lifespan, is a critical connection to the NC State Ports at Wilmington, to the workforce that commutes into Wilmington, and to the visitors that fuel our tourism economy. A replacement is our top infrastructure priority and is not included in the current State Transportation Improvement Program. We must identify additional funding to make it a reality."



Market Street in Ogden is one of many areas with high traffic in Wilmington. JAMEY CROSS/STARNEWS



TRIP's report indicated that the average Wilmington driver lost 26 hours to traffic congestion each year - and cost of \$646 in wasted fuel.

Trip officials indicated that the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) is taking steps to address traffic congestion and highway segments like the Wilmington Bypass.

## More funding?

Upcoming state and federal funding may help the N.C. Department of Transportation will help with roadway and bridge preservation by 17% and 22%, respectively, through 2032.

TRIP officials pointed out that N.C. lawmakers approved House Bill 103, which included a portion of sales tax revenue going towards road and highway projects. It's expected to produce an additional \$7.2 billion in highway funding through the 2032-2033 fiscal year.

The federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which was signed into law by President Joe Biden in November 2021, is expected to provide \$7.8 billion over five years.

But it will not be enough to keep pace with increasing inflation, according to TRIP officials. An example was labor and material cost going up by 50% in 21 months from January 2021 to September 2022.

"North Carolina's transportation infrastructure is essential to moving goods and people safely and efficiently," said Salamido. "TRIP's latest report underscores the critical need for investment in our state's transportation network, such as those called for in Senate Bill 354, which would provide a needed, bipartisan approach to jumpstarting funding that will benefit all modes of transportation. While we have made great strides, our state's leaders must continue to modernize transportation revenue streams to secure a prosperous, competitive future for North Carolina and its people."

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