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Report: Ohio roads funding adequate, but facing challenges



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A new report shows that Ohio is doing well at funding road and bridge construction but faces significant future challenges.

And the costs to operate a car in Columbus are the lowest among Ohio's five major cities.

Ohio raised its gas tax by 10.5 cents in 2019. Now at 38.5 cents per gallon, that will generate \$5.4 billion more funding for Ohio Department of Transportation projects between 2020 and 2030, according to state data provided by TRIP, the Washington D.C.-based National Transportation Research Group.

But rising construction costs and reduced fuel consumption due to electric and hybrid vehicles is offsetting the added funding.

"We are being remiss if we are not addressing this issue now, before it becomes a larger issue," said Chris Runyan, president of the Ohio Contractors Association. He envisions "potentially, a completely different kind of vehicle" in the future, one that may not only reduce pollution and energy consumption, but also the very sources of revenue needed to build and maintain infrastructure.

Federal funding to help with funding Ohio road projects

The Biden administration's Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, signed into law in November 2021, will pump an additional \$11.2 billion into Ohio in the next five years, according to the report. Federal funding already is half of that provided to ODOT.

According to the TRIP study, 31% of Ohio's major roads are in poor or mediocre condition. And that takes a financial toll on vehicles that may hit potholes or travel rough roads.

Among Ohio's five largest cities, Columbus motorists have the lowest annual vehicle operating costs at \$532. The Cleveland/Akron area is highest (\$763) followed by Cincinnati (\$720), Dayton (675) and Toledo (\$567).

The funding challenges will expand as the population grows, Runyan said: "Like any fixed asset, with increased usage, comes degradation."

And the state has already returned to pre-COVID-19 travel.

The study did not offer concrete solutions, but did note that some states impose extra fees, not incentives, for electric and hybrid vehicles. Ohio has a \$200 registration fee, one of 24 states imposing extra fees.

Among the notable projects that already are funded and expected to be complete by 2026:

- Widening of Routes 36/37 in Delaware County
- New interchange at Interstate 71 and Sunbury Parkway in Delaware County
- Improvements to Interstate 270 and Route 23 interchange (South Side) in Franklin County and interchange at Route 23 and Rathmell Road
- Adding additional westbound lane along Interstate 70 on Far East Side and improving Brice Road interchange

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