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Transportation Report Finds Increased Funding Has Improved Ohio Roads, Shortfall Looms

A new report released Tuesday by national transportation research nonprofit TRIP found that the combination of additional state and federal transportation funding has helped Ohio move forward numerous road projects to improve the condition of its surface transportation network, but the state still faces a funding shortfall that could hurt its ability to make additional repairs and improvements to roads and bridges in the future.

Rocky Moretti, director of policy and research for TRIP, said Ohio's increase in the gas tax, as well as a boost of 30 percent in federal funding through the federal infrastructure bill passed in 2021, has allowed Ohio to move forward with significant projects. At the same time, there are significant challenges on the horizon, including an increase in highway cost inflation, as well as an increase in vehicle fuel efficiency standards and an increase in the use of electric vehicles that make the gas tax less effective. He said that while some states including Ohio have begun levying fees on electric vehicles, there has not been a move to do something similar on the federal level.

The report includes a list of \$1.4 billion in critical projects that Ohio is moving forward with over the next three years, which Moretti said are critical and will improve the reliability of the state's roads and public transit systems as well as improve the safety on these systems.

"We're really entering a time where we really move beyond COVID in Ohio from 2019 to 2022, after the initial shock of COVID and a significant drop in travel," he said. "During that period, we saw vehicle travel drop by 2 percent, but through the first three quarters of 2023, vehicle travel in Ohio has increased by 2 percent, so we've returned back to the level of pre-COVID when Ohio had some very heavily traveled roads and highway."

He also noted \$1.6 billion in "critically needed" highway and transit projects that have been identified by the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), and while funding is in place for planning and engineering, there is not funding for construction.

The report also outlines various conditions on Ohio roadways, ranging from pavement conditions on the major roads, bridge conditions, traffic congestion, traffic fatalities, and funding.

Chris Runyan, president of the Ohio Contractors Association and a member of the Fix Our Roads Ohio coalition, said Ohio has one of the densest highway transportation networks in the nation. He said it has been generally well maintained, but added that wear and tear on the existing system as well as demands that will come to address business and societal needs speak to the need to address how and how much the revenue sources for Ohio roads are delivered.

Asked about the Brent Spence Bridge project between Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky, Moretti said they have not evaluated the progress of the project, but said it is the most critical piece of infrastructure in the state. Runyan added that the impact of the project is not just the bridge structure itself, but also the changes to improve traffic flow in the corridors leading up to the bridge on both sides of the river.

The full report is available at www.hannah.com.