

## Deficient roads cost Michiganders \$17B a year



By MIRS News.com on July 26, 2024

Driving on deficient roads across the state is costing Michiganders \$17 billion a year, according to a new report released this month by TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based transportation research non-profit.

The report, "Michigan Transportation by the Numbers: Meeting the State's Need for Safe, Smooth and Efficient Mobility," analyzed how driving on Michigan roads that are deteriorated, congested or lacking in safety features can result in money wasted through necessary repairs, the cost of lost time or wasted fuel due to congestion and the financial cost of traffic crashes.

Of that \$17 billion, \$5.9 billion can be attributed to additional vehicle operating costs (VOC) as a result of driving on rough roads, as 40 percent of major local-and-state-maintained roads and highways in Michigan are in poor or mediocre condition, according to the report.

On average, a Michigan driver can expect to spend \$758 annually in additional VOC, TRIP found, but drivers in Detroit and Flint may pay more, as they have the highest percentage of poorly rated roads at 53 percent. The Lansing area has the next highest percentage at 40 percent, while the Saginaw-Bay City-Midland area is at 39 percent.

Traverse City has the highest percentage of roads rated good at 59 percent.

Rocky Moretti, director of policy and research for TRIP, said the calculations are based on data from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

The TRIP report also included Michigan bridge condition calculations, finding that 11 percent of Michigan's bridges, the eight highest share in the nation, are rated in poor or structurally deficient condition, with significant deterioration of the bridge deck or supports.

The highest number of deficient bridges are in Detroit, where 263 are rated poorly, while the highest percentage of deficient bridges is 19 percent in Ann Arbor.

Another piece of the total \$17 billion in driver costs is \$5.4 billion in estimated expenses due to a lack of safety features resulting in crashes. From 2019 to 2023, 5,389 people were killed in Michigan traffic crashes, an average of 1,078 fatalities a year.

While Michigan averaged 1.04 traffic fatalities for every 100 million miles traveled in 2023, lower than the national average of 1.26, fatalities on

rural, non-interstate roads was significantly higher at 1.62 than on all other roads in the state at 1.01.

The number of fatalities has also increased between 2019 and 2023, with a sharp increase from 0.96 to 1.25 in 2022 before slightly declining each year since, while vehicle travel in the state decreased by three percent overall from 2019 through 2022.

The economic cost of these crashes in 2022 was \$16.3 billion, and while not the primary factor, traffic crashes with a lack of adequate safety features as a contributing factor made up \$5.4 billion in economic costs, according to the report.

The highest number of vehicle fatalities was also in Detroit, with 374 fatalities per year on average from 2018 through 2022, incurring \$447 per motorist in safety costs.

The area with the highest dollar figure for safety costs, however, was Kalamazoo/Battle Creek, at \$698.

The final chunk of the \$17 billion in cost to drivers is \$5.7 billion, which TRIP attributed to the cost of lost time and fuel due to increasing congestion on Michigan roads.

Based on Texas A & M Transportation Institute data for congestion levels in urban areas, TRIP estimated that while the COVID-19 pandemic caused vehicle travel to drop by as much as 54 percent in April 2020, vehicle miles traveled by 2023 had jumped back up to 3 percent below pre-pandemic levels in 2019.

On average now, Detroit residents lose 63 hours a year to congestion, \$1,410 and 24 gallons of fuel, the highest numbers across the board. Grand Rapids residents lose 42 hours, \$907 in fuel costs and 16 gallons of fuel annually, while Traverse City residents lose 31 hours, \$861 and 14 gallons of fuel.

Flint loses the least to congestion, with 13 hours on average, \$332 and five gallons of fuel.

Rob Coppersmith, executive vice president of the Michigan Infrastructure and Transportation Association (MITA), said he hopes these numbers "turn the lightbulb on for people (to) understand that Michigan has a funding problem.

"Our Governor has been doing a great job with our bonding program and the federal dollars that we've been getting, but those dry up shortly," he said. "And then we'll be on a slippery slope back to the path that we started on."

Coppersmith, who served on Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's Growing Michigan Together Council, highlighted Michigan's \$3.9 billion road funding shortfall, which was one of the things picked out by the council. He said despite additional funding, which is intended to make a dent, a 43 percent increase in highway construction and repair inflation in 2022 and 2023, coupled with a decrease in gas tax revenues as vehicles become more fuel efficient, means more money won't go as far to pay down the disparity.

Coppersmith said he hopes the information "motivates people within the legislature to recognize this shortfall that's coming, and we want to maintain the great momentum we've had over the last several years that is moving us forward.

"My work on the Growing Michigan Together Council where we did identify the \$3.9 billion shortfall ... was just part of a larger picture, and the picture of Michigan is that we understand that good infrastructure is the backbone of any good economy in any great state," he said.

On potential solutions, he said it's going to take "years to iron out" potential changes to road funding sources, "so we have to figure out exactly what we need to do in Michigan to catch up and maintain our momentum in this area ... we certainly will have to have some gap type measures to keep us on the right trajectory."