

## Report: NY-area drivers spent \$3,500 each in '24 for congested, poor, unsafe roads



Driving over rough, pothole-filled roads, like these on the Southern State Parkway in 2022, adds an estimated \$694 to the average driver's annual vehicle maintenance bill. Credit: Debbie Egan-Chin

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The average driver in the metropolitan area — including Long Island — paid nearly \$3,500 in costs associated with congested, poor and unsafe roads last year, according to a new report by a transportation research group.

The figure factors in time and fuel wasted while stuck in traffic jams, extra vehicle operating costs after driving over potholes and the financial costs of traffic crashes, according to TRIP, the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that authored the study.

In 2021, TRIP estimated the cost at about \$3,200 — although at that point the country was still coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The costs have increased even as the bipartisan infrastructure law — which President Joe Biden signed into law in late 2021 — is bringing about \$13.5 billion in highway and bridge investments in New York over five years.

Rocky Moretti, TRIP's director of policy and research, said while federal money has been coming in, crucial state and local funding has dropped off.

Meanwhile, inflation — which for highway construction labor and materials was 46% from 2022 to 2024 — has meant that each dollar for transportation doesn't go as far, according to the report.

"Unfortunately, the reality is the buying power [decreased] significantly," Moretti said, adding the drop-off in state Department of Transportation funding is "even more worrisome."

### Congested, unsafe and degraded roads are costly

The main way that poor road conditions cost the average metropolitan area driver is through congestion — accounting for \$2,535 annually, according to TRIP. That includes about 92 hours of lost time and 36 gallons of wasted fuel per driver.

Driving over rough, pot-holed roads adds an extra \$694 to the average driver's vehicle maintenance bill, according to the report. About 30% of the metropolitan area's roads are in "poor" condition, compared with about 25% statewide.

The report also found traffic fatalities have increased statewide by 19% since 2019. Financially, unsafe roads cost the average driver in the metropolitan area about \$263 last year.

Investments in safer roads — such as bike lane construction, removal of roadside objects, roundabouts, improved lighting and other projects — can help reduce crashes, according to TRIP.

Jeff Smith, the president of the New York State County Highway Superintendents Association, said he hoped TRIP's report would spur Albany to invest more to prevent further infrastructure deterioration.

"We need the transportation capital plan to include significant increases in transportation funding ... to [solve] this growing problem," he said.

### Congestion pricing and costs

TRIP's report does not cover the potential effects of congestion pricing, which began in Manhattan on Jan. 5.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority has said travel times and congestion appear to have reduced as a result of tolling, although experts say it may take months to see its true impact.

"People put great value on mobility. ... We're all very interested to see how this impacts travel patterns in the New York metro area," Moretti said.

Ashley Ranslow, New York director for the National Federation of Independent Business, said the cost of tolls themselves, rather than any impact on traffic, would hurt small businesses in Manhattan.

"For small-business owners ... all their costs of goods and services are going to go up as a result of the congestion pricing fee, and those who have to travel in and out of that district for work are going to have to pay higher prices," she said.

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