

Deteriorated roads cost Baton Rouge drivers more annually than any other city in Louisiana, study shows

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BATON ROUGE — Deteriorated roads across the state, specifically in Baton Rouge, annually costs drivers more than any other city in Louisiana in wasted fuel, additional operating costs and crashes, a report by a Washington D.C. based research firm released Wednesday said.

Transportation Research Informatics Platform's "Keeping Louisiana Mobile" report says that the average Baton Rouge driver spends \$3,530 annually because of poorly maintained roads. The second most expensive metro area is New Orleans, whose roads cost drivers on average \$3,067.

In Baton Rouge, the most significant cost to drivers is fuel wasted due to congestion; a typical commuter will spend \$1,632 annually on wasted time and fuel while waiting in traffic. Baton Rouge drivers spend 64 hours and waste 30 gallons of gas while in congestion annually.

Statewide, drivers spend \$9.9 billion annually because of roads that are "deteriorated, congested and that lack some desirable safety," TRIP's report says.

The study adds that 60% of Baton Rouge roads are either poor or mediocre; the statewide average is 50%.

The average Baton Rouge driver will spend \$945 annually on vehicle operating costs because of poorly maintained roads, second only to Lafayette at \$1,066.

The state's bridges are also contributing to these increased costs. The study goes on to say that 19% of Baton Rouge's bridges are "poor or structurally deficient," more than 10% higher than other metro areas. Statewide, 11% of bridges are poor quality, the seventh highest in the nation.

Thirty-one percent of the state's bridges were built before 1970. According to the study, most bridges are only designed to last 50 years before major overhauls or replacement. The more time spent deferring repairs on these bridges, the higher long term costs the state will incur.

"Long-term repair costs increase significantly when road and bridge maintenance is deferred, as road and bridge deterioration accelerate later in the service life of a transportation facility and require more costly repairs. A report on maintaining pavements found that every \$1 of deferred maintenance on roads and bridges costs an additional \$4 to \$5 in needed future repairs," TRIP says.

The highest disparity between the state's four major urban regions — Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Lafayette and Shreveport — is the average driver's annual expenditures caused by crashes due to poor road conditions. The Baton Rouge driver will spend \$953 on crashes each year; this is nearly \$200 more than the second-highest, New Orleans.

The study says that these costs will continue to rise unless improvements are made to state roadways.

"Making needed improvements to the state's roads, highways, bridges and transit systems would provide a significant boost to the economy by creating jobs in the short term and stimulating long-term economic growth as a result of enhanced mobility and access," the study concludes. "Despite federal funding provided by the (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) and Louisiana state funding, numerous projects to improve the condition and expand the capacity of the state's roads, highways, bridges and transit systems will not proceed without a boost in funding."