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Driving on poor roads in CA costs the average motorist $878 per year, report finds

With schools back in session, another type of report card has landed in California, and it's not a good one. An assessment of California's road infrastructure has found half of major roads are in poor or mediocre condition and traffic congestion costs the state's drivers billions annually in lost time, car repairs and wasted fuel.

This is despite billions spent by SB1, the Road Repair & Accountability Act of 2017, which raised fuel taxes under the promise of fixing much of the problems highlighted in the report by TRIP, a national transportation research non-profit.

"Driving on deteriorated roads costs the state's drivers a total of $24.2 billion each year in extra vehicle operating costs, including accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs, and increased fuel consumption and tire wear – an average of $878 per motorist," the TRIP report concluded. Productively losses due to time wasted in traffic congestion add many billions more, the report found.

The analysis lands as concerns mount about the viability of fuel taxes to pay for road repairs as more Zero-Emission Vehicles and hybrids hit California roadways. The Legislature held hearings earlier this year spotlighting the road-funding problem and exploring what to do about it. More attention has also been paid to impediments to delivery of road-improvement projects at the local and state level.

The lack of road work is not only hitting pocketbooks, but also represents a threat to safety. Traffic crashes in California claimed the lives of 24,508 people from 2019 to 2024, the report noted. While the 2024 traffic fatality rate of 1.19 deaths for every 100 million miles traveled is slightly below the national average, and has been trending down in recent years, crashes continue to be unacceptably high in the minds of engineers, elected officials and policy-makers.

"California's future depends on transportation infrastructure that can withstand the challenges of a changing climate and a growing population," state Sen. Dave Cortese, chair of the California Senate Transportation Committee, said in the announcement that accompanied the report. "These investments don't just move people and goods—they cut emissions, strengthen communities, create jobs, and spur economic growth. The TRIP report makes clear that smart infrastructure investments are among the most powerful tools we have to support California's workforce and drive long-term economic prosperity."

The TRIP announcement is HERE. It includes breakdowns by major metropolitan areas in California.