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Think you spend a lot of time in Sacramento traffic? What the numbers show

By Ariane Lange | October 2, 2025

Traffic moves southbound on Highway 99 away from Highway 50 in 2022. The average driver in Sacramento and its surrounding cities and suburbs wastes $1,518 and 62 hours of their life sitting in traffic each year, a new report found.

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The analysis was part of "Keeping California Mobile," a report on California roads published last week by the transportation research nonprofit TRIP. The researchers based their individual congestion costs for the Sacramento urban area on a report from the Texas A&M Transportation Institute, which estimates the value of lost time and additional fuel spent idling.

According to the study, Sacramento-area drivers burn 29 gallons of fuel annually due to congestion.

"Statewide, drivers lose $55 billion annually because of lost time and wasted fuel due to traffic congestion," officials from TRIP said in announcing their results. "Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, vehicle travel in California dropped by as much as 41% in April 2020 (as compared to vehicle travel during the same month the previous year). By 2025, vehicle miles of travel in California had rebounded to 5% below 2019's pre-pandemic levels."

In Los Angeles, the state's most congested region, the average driver loses 124 hours a year to traffic — double the delay seen in Sacramento — and pays $3,478 annually in lost time and wasted fuel, according to the report.

Bay Area drivers aren't far behind. In San Francisco and Oakland, the annual congestion cost per driver reaches $3,406, with 111 hours lost each year. The only major metro area with somewhat comparable congestion figures was San Jose, where drivers where the costs to time and money were roughly 25% higher than the capital region.

In California, vehicle miles traveled — the amount of distance that people travel in cars, often shortened to VMT — has increased significantly since 2000.

Part of the increase in VMT is explained by the high cost of housing. Fewer people can afford to live close to their jobs, forcing them into longer commutes.

"In California's six largest metros, the number of jobs accessible within a 40-minute drive during peak hours were reduced by 44% in 2023 as a result of traffic congestion," the report's authors said.

California is currently considering investing $500 million to widen a North Bay highway that's sinking into a marsh surrounded because low-income commuters from Solano County use the route to get to jobs in Marin, Napa and Sonoma counties. Stanford University researchers have found that 13% of commuters in the state travel 45 miles or more to get to work.

And as more people spend more time in the car, they're driving over increasingly uneven roads. The TRIP report found that the capital region's roads are badly maintained. Data showed that 21% of roadways in Sacramento and surrounding cities and suburbs were in "good" condition and 9% were in "fair" condition. The other 70% were in poor or mediocre condition. Based on regional VMT and the state of local roads, TRIP's researchers estimated that each driver bears an average of $1,082 a year due to wear and tear on a car as well as wasted fuel.

Residents pay for bad roads, more driving

Taxpayers will have to foot the bill for bad roads in the future, because putting off needed repairs means the repairs get more expensive. As the TRIP report notes, Cornell University's Local Roads Program has found that $1 spent rehabilitating a road when it's still in fair condition would be $4 or $5 if the road were allowed to fall into a very poor condition. And the more people drive on a road, the more wear and tear the road suffers.

"California's transportation dollars are already being stretched thin by increased inflation in construction costs and declining fuel tax revenue," said Dave Kearby, TRIP's executive director. "Without additional transportation investment, needed projects that would make the state's roads safer, smoother and more efficient will not move forward."

Pedestrians and cyclists cause far less wear and tear on road surfaces, saving taxpayer money. But while California has invested heavily in driving infrastructure, the state and many of its cities have been slow to create safe and convenient paths for people on foot or biking. The Sacramento-Roseville-Folsom metropolitan area already bears the distinction of being one of the most dangerous places for pedestrians in the United States.

The TRIP report tallied the number of people who died in California vehicle crashes over the five years between 2019 and the end of 2023. In Sacramento, Yolo, El Dorado and Placer counties, there were 1,411 deaths. Of the dead, 402 people were pedestrians and 50 were cyclists — almost one-third of the total.

The worst area for pedestrian and cyclist deaths in California was the Los Angeles area, where more than 2,000 pedestrians and cyclists died in those five years — 40% of the total deaths in those years.