

GUEST OPINION

New report has bad news regarding New Mexico roads

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A recent report from a national transportation research nonprofit organization called the TRIP Report came out last week and it's not a pretty picture for New Mexico.

Over the last decade, roads in this state have deteriorated dramatically and if a solution is not found soon, our state could easily become dead last in road conditions, safety, and lost time.

Here are some of the facts in the report.

The New Mexico Department of Transportation has identified more than \$7.5 billion in needed but unfunded transportation throughout the state to address safety, reliability and preservation challenges, states the report. That's \$7.5 billion with a capital B. Since our entire state budget now runs at \$11 billion, you can see that we're in a world of hurt when it comes to our roads.

This number is going up dramatically year over year as well. In the last report, our state had only \$5.6 billion in unfunded projects around the state. In 2017, there were only \$1.3 billion in needed but unfunded projects. As you can see, we're headed in the wrong direction.

This affects the average driver in many ways, including in the pocketbook. The TRIP Report identifies several factors that cost drivers money – a lot of money. It takes into account vehicle operation costs, safety, congestion, and lost time.

In Albuquerque, unmaintained roads costs the average driver over \$3,000 a year in additional costs above the usual car loans, gas, maintenance, oil changes, and any major repairs. Automobiles and trucks already cost a lot, but this report shows that the costs are astronomical. Santa Fe drivers pay over \$2,000 a year in additional costs, and Las Cruces drivers just under \$2,000.

Where does the damage come from? Well, the report states that 56% of major locally and state-maintained roads and highways in New Mexico are in poor or mediocre condition. Costs are different in different parts of the state.

In Las Cruces, for instance, 65% of roads are in poor or mediocre condition. It is critical that roads are fixed before they require major repairs because reconstructing roads costs approximately four times more than resurfacing them, according to the report.

While many of our road challenges have a variety of factors, funding is of course the most critical in fixing this problem and keeping our drivers safe.

In the 2025 legislative session, a small fraction of funds were allocated for road construction and maintenance, about \$65 million dollars. So, we lost a year of new construction and maintenance, which is apparent from the new TRIP Report.

Legislators and the governor are committed to a safe and responsible road program, and last year was really a fluke.

This year, in the current legislative session, we can go a long way towards fixing the problem. A roads package is moving forward, with a \$1.5 billion bond and \$500 million in a special appropriation. The special appropriation would go towards maintenance and new construction of local roads. We urge legislators to support this package.

This is a problem New Mexicans can fix, if legislators and the governor make roads a priority in the current session, as they have pledged to do. I would like to applaud both legislators and the governor for recognizing the need to fund the road package. Moving the road package forward and steering our state into a better transportation future will restore confidence in New Mexico's roads and highways with safe and reliable roads.

Dan Lewis is the executive director of Asphalt Pavement Association of New Mexico.