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LOCAL NEWS

Baltimore traffic, potholes cost drivers \$3,000 annually, report shows

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Drivers in the Baltimore region are paying thousands each year because of rough roads, traffic congestion and crashes, according to a new report from the transportation research nonprofit TRIP.

The analysis found motorists in the Baltimore metro area pay about \$3,017 per year in added costs tied to deteriorating roads, delays and traffic crashes linked to inadequate safety features. Statewide, those problems cost drivers about \$12.5 billion annually, the report found. Baltimore's road conditions rank among the worst in Maryland. The report found 41% of major roads in the Baltimore area are in poor condition and 21% are in mediocre condition, meaning more than half fall below good condition.

That's significantly worse than other parts of the state. In the Frederick-Hagerstown region, 25% of roads are rated poor and 18% mediocre, while in Maryland's Washington suburbs — including Montgomery and Prince George's counties — 27% are poor and 24% mediocre.

The costs reflect several factors, including vehicle damage caused by rough pavement, wasted fuel and time from traffic congestion, and the economic impact of crashes tied to missing or inadequate safety features.

The city's argument

In response to questions from The Baltimore Sun, the city pointed to a recent interview Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott gave on The Jay Hill Podcast about the subject.

In the appearance, Scott said the city's road conditions are partly the result of a long-standing funding gap in the state's Highway User Revenue program, which distributes gas tax and other transportation revenue to local governments.

Baltimore's capital highway user revenue funding was eliminated during the 2008 recession, Scott said, and has never been fully restored. The city is the only jurisdiction in Maryland responsible for maintaining all of its roadways, including state routes within city limits. "Road resurfacing in Maryland is done through the highway user revenue program at the state," Scott said in the podcast appearance. "The state collects gas tax and distributes it to the city and counties to maintain roads. But Baltimore is the only jurisdiction responsible for all of its roads."

The city maintains about 2,000 miles of roadways, 1,400 traffic signals, 298 bridges and 456 miles of alleys, along with major highways such as Interstate 83.

Before 2010, Baltimore received roughly \$200 million annually in Highway User Revenue funding to support those responsibilities — the equivalent of about \$300 million today when adjusted for inflation, he said.

And city officials are trying to repave Baltimore's roads, a long-term fix for pavement damaged over time. Last year, the city announced plans for nearly \$30 million in resurfacing projects aimed at "significantly increasing" road repairs.

But by year's end, many of those projects remained incomplete, according to the city's own resurfacing data. Officials note that most repaving work occurs between spring and fall, when asphalt can properly settle, leaving streets vulnerable to potholes during colder months.

Breaking down the data

The TRIP report found that Baltimore drivers pay about \$954 annually in additional vehicle operating costs, including faster depreciation, more repairs, higher fuel consumption and increased tire wear caused by potholes and uneven road surfaces.

Rocky Moretti, Director of Policy and Research for TRIP, said rising construction costs are making it harder for governments to keep up with repairs, even with recent federal transportation funding increases.

The federal transportation program reauthorized in 2021 boosted funding for roads and transit by 29%, but highway construction inflation has increased 47% since the bill passed, limiting how far the money goes, he said.

"It's really an attempt to help the public monetize what they see through their windshield," Moretti said. "When you look at the additional costs the public pays because the transportation system is inadequate, it's unfortunately another cost that the public bears."

He said investing more in repairs and safety improvements could ultimately reduce those costs.

"These inadequacies are costing over \$12 billion a year," Moretti said. "If you increased investment to make the system more reliable and safer, the benefits would likely exceed the cost of making those improvements."

Have a news tip? Contact Chevall Pryce at cpryce@baltsun.com or Josh Davis at jdavis@baltsun.com or on X as [@JoshDavis4Shore](https://twitter.com/JoshDavis4Shore).