

### Drive through the Hagerstown area? Bad roads are costing you nearly \$2,000 a YEAR, experts say

Staff Report | March 16, 2026

HAGERSTOWN- On top of rising costs of everyday essentials like food, housing, fuel, utilities, and more, you are having to pay more than you probably should just to take the roads in and around the tristate.

Experts at the nonprofit thinktank TRIP say that roads and bridges that are deteriorated, congested or lack some desirable safety features cost Maryland motorists a total of \$12.5 billion statewide annually – \$1,933 per driver in the Frederick/Hagerstown urban area – due to higher vehicle operating costs, traffic crashes and congestion related delays.

A lack of adequate investment in transportation and increasing inflation in construction costs could hamper Maryland’s ability to make needed improvements to its transportation network, they say in a new report. The TRIP report, “Maryland Transportation by the Numbers: Providing a Modern, Sustainable Transportation System in the Old Line State,” finds that throughout Maryland, more than half of major locally and state-maintained roads are in poor or mediocre condition, 4% of locally and state maintained bridges (20 feet or more in length) are rated poor/structurally deficient, traffic congestion is choking commuting and commerce, and the number of traffic fatalities has increased significantly in the last decade. In addition to statewide data, the TRIP report includes regional pavement and bridge conditions, congestion data, highway safety data, and cost breakdowns for the Baltimore and Frederick/Hagerstown urban areas and the Maryland portion of the Washington, DC suburbs.

Driving on roads in the Frederick/Hagerstown area costs the average driver \$1,933 per year in the form of extra vehicle operating costs (VOC) as a result of driving on roads in need of repair, lost time and fuel due to congestion-related delays, and the costs of traffic crashes in which the lack of adequate roadway safety features, while not the primary factor, likely were a contributing factor. A breakdown of the costs per motorist in the state’s largest urban areas, along with a statewide total, is below.

Location	VOC	Congestion	Safety	TOTAL
Baltimore	\$954	\$1,502	\$561	\$3,017
Frederick/Hagerstown	\$648	\$630	\$655	\$1,933
Maryland DC Suburbs	\$746	\$2,281	\$518	\$3,545
Maryland Statewide	\$3.7 Billion	\$6.1 Billion	\$2.7 Billion	\$12.5 Billion

Without additional transportation funding at the local, state and federal levels, costs to motorists will increase, needed projects will be delayed and the existing transportation funding shortfall will grow. The Maryland Department of Transportation’s (MDOT) six-year capital spending plan shows that MDOT’s operating costs and spending outpace revenue by \$1.3 billion. Revenue from Maryland’s motor fuel tax — a primary transportation funding source — is falling behind future needs as improved fuel efficiency and growing electric and hybrid vehicle use reduce gas tax collections. At the same time, inflation has significantly increased highway construction costs. The Federal Highway Administration’s national highway construction cost index rose 47% from early 2022 through the first half of 2025, significantly reducing the purchasing power of available transportation dollars.

“Interstate 81 is one of the most important freight corridors on the East Coast, yet Maryland’s 12-mile stretch still lacks the capacity needed to safely handle today’s growing truck traffic,” said Jim Kercheval, executive director of the Greater Hagerstown Committee. “When crashes shut down I-81, trucks flood onto our local roads, paralyzing our community and disrupting the regional economy. Adding a third lane to I-81 has been our county’s top transportation priority for over 25 years, yet we’ve only completed one mile of this twelve-mile Maryland section due to funding limitations.”

News Talk 1037FM was able to speak with Kercheval after the report was released on Monday, with him going into detail on the struggles that the state faces when it comes to infrastructure even though, as he says, infrastructure dollars regularly quadruple their investments. The full interview is below.



NEWSTALK 1037FM

16 March 2026 Jim Kercheval Report

The TRIP report finds that 43% of major locally and state-maintained roads in the Frederick/Hagerstown urban area are in poor or mediocre condition, costing the average motorist an additional \$648 each year in extra vehicle operating costs, including accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs, and increased fuel consumption and tire wear. Statewide, 51% of Maryland’s major roads are in poor or mediocre condition.

In the Frederick/Hagerstown area, 3% of bridges are rated poor/structurally deficient, with significant deterioration to the bridge deck, supports or other major components. Statewide, 4% of Maryland’s bridges are rated poor/structurally deficient.

Traffic congestion in the Frederick/Hagerstown area causes 35 annual hours of delay for the average motorist and costs the average driver \$630 annually in lost time and wasted fuel. Frederick/Hagerstown drivers waste an average of six gallons of fuel per motorist annually due to congestion. Statewide, drivers lose \$6.1 billion annually as a result of lost time and wasted fuel due to traffic congestion. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, vehicle travel in Maryland dropped by as much as 47% in April 2020 (as compared to vehicle travel during the same month the previous year). By 2025, vehicle miles of travel in Maryland had rebounded to 4% below 2019’s pre-pandemic levels.

“Fourteen people have died on Maryland’s stretch of I-81 in the last five years as truck traffic has grown and congestion has worsened,” said Kercheval. “The tragic human toll is reason enough to act, but even the federal economic analysis shows the short and long-term costs of these crashes exceeds the cost of adding a third lane to improve safety forever.”

Traffic crashes in Maryland claimed the lives of 3,435 people from 2019 to 2024. In the decade from 2014 to 2024 the number of traffic fatalities in

Maryland and the state’s traffic fatality rate both increased 31%. In the Frederick/Hagerstown area, on average, 44 people were killed in traffic crashes each year from 2019 to 2023. The financial impact of traffic crashes in which the lack of adequate roadway safety features, while not the primary factor, were likely a contributing factor, was an

average of \$655 annually per each Frederick/Hagerstown area driver – a total of \$2.7 billion statewide.

“If we want Harford County to remain a premier go-to destination for Maryland tourism, we cannot ask our visitors to navigate a system that costs them time, money, and safety,” said Tyler Zeisloft, executive director of Visit Harford. “A smooth, safe, and efficient network isn’t just a luxury—it is the essential infrastructure required to keep our \$510 million county-wide tourism economy from stalling out.”

The efficiency and condition of Maryland’s transportation system, particularly its highways, is critical to the health of the state’s economy. In 2024 Maryland’s freight system moved 308 million tons of freight, valued at \$387 billion. From 2024 to 2050, freight moved annually in Maryland by trucks is expected to increase 55% by weight and 101% by value (inflation-adjusted dollars). The design, construction and maintenance of transportation infrastructure in Maryland supports approximately 77,800 full-time jobs across all sectors of the state economy. Approximately one million full-time jobs in Maryland in key industries like tourism, retail sales, agriculture and manufacturing are dependent on the quality, safety and reliability of the state’s transportation infrastructure network.

“Maryland’s transportation dollars are already being stretched thin by increased inflation in construction costs, and the state’s existing transportation funding shortfall will make it harder to complete needed improvements,” said Dave Kearby, TRIP’s executive director. “It will be critical that Maryland adequately invest in its transportation network in order to provide a system that is smooth, safe and efficient.”