

Missoula report highlights Montana road and bridge safety concerns

[Isaiah Ruiz NonStop Local Multimedia Journalist](#) | May 19, 2026



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Missoula, Mont. — A new report discussed in Missoula said Montana faces road and bridge problems that are raising safety concerns and adding costs for drivers.

I sat in on the meeting where the findings were discussed earlier and heard concerns about the biggest challenges facing the state's infrastructure.

The report from TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit, found 31% of Montana's major roads were in poor or mediocre condition. It said those road conditions cost drivers about \$605 a year in extra vehicle expenses.

The report also found 7% of bridges across the state were considered structurally deficient.

It pointed to safety concerns as well. Between 2019 and 2024, more than 1,260 people were killed in crashes across Montana.

The report also found fatal crash rates were much higher on rural roads than on other roads.

Rocky Moretti of TRIP pointed to one of the key concerns.

“It's rural, not interstate. Roads is more than double the fatality rate on all other roads. And also note that the traffic fatality rate per 100 million miles of traveling Montana in

2024 was the seventh highest in the nation,” said Rocky Moretti, TRIP's director of policy and research.

Funding came up as a major hurdle during the discussion.

The report included a statement from TRIP's executive director about the need for more investment.

“Without additional investment, needed transportation projects in Montana will be left stranded on the drawing board,” said the executive director in the report.

Another question raised during the meeting focused on how infrastructure affects Montana's ability to help business sectors move forward.

Alison Corbyn of the Montana Infrastructure Coalition [link] said the report helped show where leaders may need to focus future investment.

“We've really got some aging infrastructure. But this really tells us where we need to put our focus, when we're looking at opportunities for greater investment in infrastructure from both the state and the federal government. So those are our big takeaways from and we really appreciate Tripp's work on this report,” said Alison Corbyn, chief operating officer of the Montana Infrastructure Coalition.