



May 20, 2009

## Highway groups: Put money into SC roads

By: The Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. - Spending money on deteriorating roads and bridges is essential to improving South Carolina's economy and putting people back to work, advocates said Wednesday in releasing a report on the condition of the state's highways.

Nearly half of South Carolina's major urban roads are congested, and many roads and bridges show significant deterioration, according to a report by the Washington-based transportation research group TRIP. It did not put a cost on the needed upgrades.

Members of TRIP and the South Carolina Alliance to Fix Our Roads, a nonprofit made up of business leaders and local governments, called on state and federal lawmakers to put more money into South Carolina's roadways.

"South Carolina's roads are among the deadliest in the nation," said the report's author, Carolyn Bonifas of TRIP, citing the state's fourth-highest traffic fatality rate. The report shows rural roads are most dangerous.

The report said the ability to transport and receive goods quickly via the highways is critical to South Carolina industries.

The state, which posted an 11.4 percent unemployment rate in March, can't afford to lose jobs to states with better infrastructure, and pumping money into highways will create construction jobs, said Otis Rawl, president of the state Chamber of Commerce.

The alliance supports up to a 10-cent increase on the state gasoline tax for infrastructure, which has stood at 16 cents a gallon since 1987, but Rawl acknowledged any gas tax increase is unlikely during the recession.

The report coincided with National Transportation Week. But, with just one day left in a legislative session marked by a budget crisis, the advocates say they realize state legislators won't act on the report this year. They say they hope Congress will boost funding in a bill this fall.

The \$463 million the state will receive in federal stimulus funds for highways and bridges plus \$41 million for public transit will help, but that's a short-term fix that will go largely toward maintenance such as road resurfacing rather than big projects, Bonifas said.