

Ga. DOT's highway forecast: Too much traffic, too many bad roads and bridges, not enough money

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Georgia faces \$51 billion transportation funding shortfall through 2035 that will lead to worsening congestion and deteriorated highways and bridges if not addressed; growing congestion in Atlanta area threatens to choke off economic growth and erode quality of life in the region

Atlanta, Oct. 25, 2007 – Georgia faces a \$51 billion shortfall through 2035 in funding for needed road, highway and bridge repairs and improvements.

Because of the funding shortfall, many projects that are needed to improve roadway conditions, enhance traffic safety, boost economic development opportunities and relieve traffic congestion will not go forward, according to a new report released today by TRIP, a national nonprofit transportation research group.

The report also found that increases in population and travel in the state have contributed to worsening traffic congestion, which threatens to reduce quality of life and impede economic development.

According to the report, entitled "Future Mobility in Georgia: Meeting the State's Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility," \$62 billion in highway transportation funding will be available in the state through 2035.

However, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) estimates that \$113 billion is needed during that time to complete highway and bridge projects that are on the existing transportation plans of state, regional and local agencies. A list of the most-needed but unfunded projects in the Atlanta metro area can be found in the report, along with a list of projects needed throughout the state.

"It is critical that Georgia's residents, visitors and businesses have a transportation system that is safe, smooth and efficient and able to meet the mobility demands of the future," said William Wilkins, executive director of TRIP.

Due to sharp increases in population and vehicle travel in Georgia, the state's urban routes are becoming increasingly congested, limiting personal and commercial mobility. Georgia's population increased by 45 percent, to 9.4 million people from 1990 to 2006 - the fifth highest level of population growth in the nation, and the largest growth east of the Mississippi.

Since 1990, travel on Georgia's highways since 1990 has increased at a rate 10 times greater than new lane capacity was added. From 1990 to 2005, highway lane miles (limited-access routes only) in the state increased by six percent and travel on the state's highways increased by 63 percent.

The TRIP report identifies the 20 most congested sections of roadway in the Atlanta metro area. Topping the list is the 8.6-mile section of I-75 and I-85 from I-85 South to I-85 North, due to high traffic volumes and special

operating conditions including closely spaced interchanges and backup from overcrowded interchanges.

The report notes that Georgia's 2006 long-range transportation plan found that "the inability to meet the state's ever growing transportation needs, and the congestion which will result from this failure, will in all likelihood choke off or greatly reduce forecasted levels of economic growth and degrade the quality of life of its residents," according to GDOT.

According to the TRIP report, a total of one in five Georgia bridges – 20 percent – show significant deterioration or do not meet current design standards. Seven percent of Georgia's bridges were structurally deficient in 2006 and 13 percent were functionally obsolete.

Georgia faces a significant challenge, with nearly two-thirds of its bridges due for major repairs over the next 20 years. The TRIP report contains a list of the most structurally deficient bridges in the state.

Although Georgia currently leads the nation with pavements on 93 percent of major roads rated in good condition, by 2027, 40 percent of the state's roadways will need significant rehabilitation or repair to allow them to remain in good condition.

The TRIP report also found that traffic fatalities on Georgia's roadways are occurring at a rate higher than the national average and traffic fatalities on the state's rural, non-Interstate routes are occurring at a rate significantly higher than on all other roadways in the state.

Additional findings of the TRIP report:

- Some of the needed but currently unfunded projects in the state include the widening of Interstate 95 from the South Carolina border to the Florida border from six to eight-lanes, the widening of an 85-mile portion of Interstate 85 from Valdosta to the Dooly County Line from four to six lanes, and the widening of portions of Interstate 75 from I-675 to I-475 and from the Barrett Parkway to the Tennessee state line from six to eight lanes

- In the Atlanta area, some of the needed projects that lack adequate funding include: the addition of high occupancy vehicle lanes to carry transit, carpools and vanpools along portions of State Route 400 and Interstates 75, 85 and 285, and the addition of truck-only lanes along a 10-mile portion of Interstate 75.

- GDOT estimates that there is also an additional \$23 billion funding shortfall for transit, aviation and ports in Georgia through the year 2035.