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## TRIP: Arkansas Needs Additional Funds to Address Growing Transportation Challenges

More than one-third of Arkansas' major roads are deteriorating and the state is grappling with several other key surface transportation problems, the nonprofit transportation research organization TRIP concluded in a report released this week.

"As Arkansas looks to rebound from the current economic downturn, the state will need to improve the physical condition of its surface transportation network and enhance the system's ability to provide efficient and reliable mobility for residents, visitors, and businesses," the report states.

The document, "Future Mobility in Arkansas: Meeting the State's Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility," found that 9% of the Natural State's major roads are in poor condition and another 25% have been rated mediocre. Roads in need of repair cost each Arkansas driver a yearly average of \$308 in extra vehicle operating expenses -- a total of \$634 million statewide.

"This certainly confirms the needs that we have been talking about here in Arkansas, needs not only in safety and bridge work, [but also] capacity," said Dan Flowers, director of the Arkansas State Highway & Transportation Department. He stressed that mobility improvements in the state are needed "through the development of a four-lane grid system that serves economic development and access to the interstate highway system."

Arkansas ranked fifth nationally in the number of fatal traffic crashes in 2008. That rate was 1.81 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled, which is 44% higher than the national average of 1.25.

Traffic congestion is another growing problem in Arkansas, TRIP says. In 2008, 39% of the state's urban highways were congested during peak travel times. Some of Arkansas' most severe chokepoints can be found in the Little Rock area, including the Interstate 430/Interstate 630 interchange and a five-mile segment of Interstate 30.

Arkansas' bridges likewise demand attention, TRIP found. Approximately 7% of the state's bridges are structurally deficient and another 15% are functionally obsolete.

The report identifies several key transportation projects that can't move forward without a substantial increase in funding. These projects include reconstruction, pavement preservation, widening of a number of highways throughout the state, and the repair or replacement of several bridges: Interstate 40 at Lake Dardanelle in Pope County, Interstate 40 over the White River in Prairie County, and Interstate 540 on the Arkansas River in Sebastian and Van Buren counties.

The American Recovery & Reinvestment Act has provided Arkansas with approximately \$352 million for highways and bridges and \$28 million for mass transit. As the report makes clear, however, those amounts are still not enough to cover all top-priority transportation expenditures within the state.

"Increased funding at the state and federal level is essential in addressing the concerns identified by the TRIP report," said D.B. Hill III, vice president of the Arkansas Good Roads Transportation Council.

The 39-page report is available at [tinyurl.com/Arkansas-Report](http://tinyurl.com/Arkansas-Report).