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TRIP Report Highlights Pennsylvania's Surface Transportation Challenges

Pennsylvania faces some steep difficulties when it comes to maintaining its surface transportation infrastructure and improving traffic mobility and safety throughout the state, concludes a recently issued report from the nonprofit transportation research organization TRIP.

"With an unemployment rate of 9% and with the state's population continuing to grow, Pennsylvania must improve its system of roads, highways, bridges, and public transit to foster economic growth and ensure the safe, reliable mobility needed to improve the quality of life for all Pennsylvanians," according to the report.

TRIP cites a recent study by the Pennsylvania State Transportation Advisory Committee that found the Keystone State faces an annual funding shortfall of \$3.5 billion to meet surface transportation needs. This problem has only grown worse with ever-increasing congestion levels.

Vehicle travel on Pennsylvania's highways, for example, jumped 26% between 1990 and 2008 -- an increase from about 86 billion vehicle miles traveled to 108 billion. Vehicle travel is expected to rise another 25% by 2025, reaching 135 billion VMT.

That ongoing heavy usage has caused further deterioration

of Pennsylvania's roads. In 2008, 15% of the state's major roads were rated in poor condition and another 28% were classified as mediocre. Consequently, according to the report, driving on those roads cost the average Pennsylvania motorist an annual average of \$341 in extra vehicle operating costs -- a total of nearly \$3 billion statewide.

As of last year, 27% of Pennsylvania's bridges were rated as structurally deficient -- the highest percentage for that category in the nation -- and 17% were declared functionally obsolete.

Pennsylvania's traffic fatality rate is another key cause for concern, according to TRIP. That rate in 2008 was 1.36 fatalities per 100 million VMT, which was higher than the national average of 1.25. The estimated cost that year for serious crashes in the state in which roadway characteristics were likely a contributing factor was about \$3 billion.

The report also lists various crucial transportation projects throughout Pennsylvania that cannot move forward without adequate funding. Those projects include rehabilitating Pennsylvania 309 in Bucks County, replacing SEPTA rail cars in the Philadelphia area, restoring rail service in Delaware County from Elwyn to Wawa, resurfacing improvements on

Interstate 83 in the Harrisburg region, designing and building a transit center in Allegheny County, and updating a fleet of 55 buses in and around Pittsburgh.

While the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provided a helpful downpayment for improvements to Pennsylvania's transportation network, a substantial long-term boost in funding remains needed to address the many existing and emerging needs throughout the state, TRIP asserts.

"Pennsylvania must improve its system of roads, highways, bridges, and public transit to foster economic growth, create jobs, avoid business relocations, and ensure the safe, reliable mobility needed to improve the quality of life for all Pennsylvanians," Ted Leonard, executive director of the Pennsylvania AAA Foundation, said in a statement.

The 21-page report, "Future Mobility in Pennsylvania: The Condition, Use, and Funding of Pennsylvania's Roads, Bridges, and Transit Systems," is available at bit.ly/TRIP-PA.

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