

Louisiana Road and Bridge Conditions Threatened by \$12.5 Billion Transportation Funding Backlog

Louisiana faces a \$12.5 billion transportation funding shortfall at a time when nearly half of the state's major roads are deteriorated, more than a quarter of bridges need improvement, traffic congestion continues to choke major urban roads, and the state's traffic fatality rate is among the highest in the nation. Unless Louisiana is able to close the funding gap, the state will be unable to complete numerous projects that would improve road and bridge conditions and safety, or widen key roadways to support long-term economic growth in the state. Driving on roads that are deteriorated, congested or lack some desirable safety features costs Louisiana motorists a total of \$3.1 billion annually – \$1,052 per driver in the Baton Rouge area and \$1,254 per New Orleans motorist. This is according to a new report released last week by TRIP, a Washington, D.C. based national transportation research organization.

According to the TRIP report, "*Future Mobility in Louisiana: Meeting the State's Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility*," Louisiana's backlog of needed road, highway and bridge repairs has decreased from \$14 billion in 2006 to \$12.5 billion at the end of 2009, largely as a result of the boost in transportation funding from the use of state surplus revenue from 2007 to 2009 and the use of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding. Making further progress in addressing the state's need for improved roads, highways, bridges and public transit will require that the recent increase in transportation investment is sustained in the future.

The Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (La DOTD) has identified numerous needed transportation projects throughout the state that currently lack adequate funding to proceed. In the

Baton Rouge area, these projects include the rehabilitation of the Port Allen Canal Bridge, adding lanes to nearly eight miles of I-10 in East Baton Rouge and Ascension Parishes, and the implementation of a passenger rail corridor between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. A full list of needed road, bridge and transit projects throughout the state is included in the report.

"There is no doubt that additional recurring revenue is essential to improve Louisiana's inadequate transportation infrastructure and alleviate congestion," said Jennifer Marusak, communications director for Driving Louisiana Forward. "With no new revenue on the horizon, we must continue to explore innovative financing mechanisms and dedicating one-time monies. More importantly, we must continue to join with the Louisiana Legislature in fighting any attempts to further raid the Transportation Trust Fund and insure TTF dollars are being spent on building and maintaining our transportation system."

The TRIP report finds that a total of 44 percent of Louisiana's major state and locally maintained roads are in poor or mediocre condition. In the Baton Rouge area, a total of 60 percent of major roads are in poor or mediocre condition, while a total of 68 percent of major roads in the New Orleans area are in poor or mediocre condition. In addition to deteriorated road conditions, 13 percent of Louisiana bridges are structurally deficient and an additional 16 percent are functionally obsolete. Traffic congestion is a growing burden in Louisiana. According to the TRIP report, 43 percent of the state's major urban roads are congested during peak travel times.

Louisiana's roads are among the deadliest in the nation, with traffic crashes claiming the lives of 4,782 people between 2004 and 2008. The

state has a traffic fatality rate of 2.02 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel, the second highest in the nation. Louisiana's rural, non-Interstate roads are particularly deadly, with a traffic fatality rate that is more than double that on all other roads in the state.

The federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided approximately \$496 million in stimulus funding for highway, bridge and transit improvements in Louisiana. This funding has created jobs and served as an important down payment on needed road, highway and bridge improvements but is not sufficient to allow the state to proceed with numerous projects needed to modernize its surface transportation system. The current long-term federal surface transportation legislation, which expires on Dec. 31, 2010, remains a critical source of funding for road and bridge repairs and transit improvements in Louisiana. With the current federal transportation program set to expire, Congress has an opportunity to approve a new federal surface transportation program that could include a significant boost in funding for highway and transit improvements in Louisiana.

"Unless Louisiana is able to close its \$12.5 billion transportation funding gap, many additional needed projects will remain stranded on the drawing board because of insufficient funding," said Will Wilkins, executive director of TRIP. "It is critical that Louisiana's transportation system is adequately funded at the state and federal level. Thousands of jobs and the state's economy are riding on it."

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