California's bad roads are costing us.

According to a new study from the Road Information Program, a national transportation advocacy group, California drivers waste $44 billion per year just by driving on our state's deficient roads.

The group calculated the cost based on additional vehicle operating costs (thanks, potholes), delays based on congestion and crashes.

The numbers are depressing. The average driver in the San Francisco-Oakland area loses $2,206 and 61 hours per year. That's money and time that no one can get back. It eats away at commuter well-being and economic growth.

It's also a public safety problem. Only 25 percent of the state's roads are rated in "good" condition, and 28 percent of our locally and state maintained bridges are either structurally deficient or functionally obsolete. That means that in addition to the whopping financial costs, there's also a human cost to the lack of repairs.

All of this adds up to a potential investment that would give California tremendous bang for the buck - the Federal Highway Administration has estimated that every dollar spent on transportation infrastructure improvements creates an average benefit of $5.20 in terms of reduced vehicle maintenance costs, delays, fuel consumption and other benefits.

Congress is responsible for approving long-term highway transportation funding. Sadly, current lawmakers have been so gridlocked that they were only able to approve an eight-month extension, which will expire in May 2015. Using highway transportation funds as a political bargaining chip may give some legislators a boost in their own districts, but it's bad for the nation as a whole.

There's also a need for more funding at the local and state levels. Regular maintenance investments could greatly improve the longevity of California's roads, but that's money that is too often diverted into flashier projects.

It may not be exciting or politically rewarding to insist on making investments that will save lives and money, but that's what political leadership is supposed to be.