

KEY FACTS ABOUT NORTH CAROLINA'S SURFACE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM AND FEDERAL FUNDING

May 2017

Roads and highways are the backbone of the U.S. transportation system, allowing Americans to travel more than 2 trillion miles annually. But conditions on the system are deteriorating, as the need for transportation improvements far outpaces the amount of state and federal funding available. As North Carolina and the nation continue to rebound from the recession, making needed improvements to roads, bridges and public transit could provide a significant boost to the state's economy by creating jobs and stimulating long-term economic growth as a result of enhanced mobility and access.

In December 2015 President Obama signed into law a long-term federal surface transportation program that includes modest funding increases and allows state and local governments to plan and finance projects with greater certainty through 2020. The [Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act \(FAST Act\)](#) provides approximately \$305 billion for surface transportation with highway and transit funding slated to increase by approximately 15 and 18 percent, respectively, over the five-year duration of the program. While the modest funding increase and certainty provided by the FAST Act are a step in the right direction, the funding falls far short of the level needed to improve conditions and meet the nation's mobility needs and fails to deliver a sustainable, long-term source of revenue for the federal Highway Trust Fund. When the FAST Act expires at the end of FY 2020, the Congressional Budget Office projects the average annual shortfall to the federal Highway Trust Fund will grow to \$18 billion.

Federal Funding for Our Nation's Surface Transportation System Generates Jobs; Making Needed Highway Improvements Assures Economic Recovery and Growth

- Enhancing critical transportation assets will boost the economy in the short-term by creating jobs in construction and related fields. In the long-term these improvements will enhance economic competitiveness and improve the quality of life for the state's residents and visitors by reducing travel delays and transportation costs, improving access and mobility, improving safety, and stimulating sustained job growth.
- The [2015 AASHTO Transportation Bottom Line Report](#) found that annual investment in the nation's roads, highways and bridges needs to increase from \$88 billion to \$120 billion and from \$17 billion to \$43 billion in the nation's public transit systems, to improve conditions and meet the nation's mobility needs. The report also found that the current backlog in needed road, highway and bridge improvements is \$740 billion.
- The Federal Highway Administration estimates that each dollar spent on road, highway and bridge improvements results in an average benefit of \$5.20 in the form of reduced vehicle maintenance costs, reduced delays, reduced fuel consumption, improved safety, reduced road and bridge maintenance costs and reduced emissions as a result of improved traffic flow.
- A 2015 survey of corporate executives by [Area Development Magazine](#) listed highway accessibility as the number two site selection factor, behind only the availability of skilled labor.
- Eighty-four percent of the \$704 billion worth of commodities shipped to and from sites in North Carolina is transported by trucks on the state's highways. An additional 12 percent is delivered by parcel, U.S. Postal Service or courier, which use multiple modes, including highways.



Current Road and Bridge Conditions, Travel Trends and Traffic Congestion

- Thirty-six percent of North Carolina's major roads are in poor or mediocre condition. Driving on roads in need of repair costs North Carolina motorists \$2.9 billion a year in extra vehicle repairs and operating costs – \$411 per motorist.
- Ten percent of North Carolina's bridges are structurally deficient.
- Forty-one percent of North Carolina's urban Interstates experience congestion during peak hours. Traffic congestion costs American motorists \$121 billion a year in wasted time and fuel costs.
- Americans rely almost exclusively on motor vehicles for mobility. Travel in private vehicles accounts for 88 percent of all person miles of travel. Air travel accounts for eight percent of all person miles of travel, while transit (including buses and trains) accounts for one percent.
- Vehicle travel on North Carolina's highways increased by 29 percent from 2000 to 2016. North Carolina's population grew by 26 percent between 2000 and 2016.
- Vehicle travel on America's highways increased by 17 percent from 2000 to 2016, while new road mileage increased by only five percent. The nation's population grew by 15 percent from 2000 to 2016.

Roadway Improvements Can Save Lives and Reduce Traffic Crashes

- It is estimated that roadway features are likely a contributing factor in approximately one-third of traffic fatalities. There were 1,379 traffic fatalities in 2015 in North Carolina. A total of 6,471 people died on North Carolina's highways from 2011 through 2015.
- North Carolina's traffic fatality rate of 1.23 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel is higher than the national average of 1.13. The fatality rate on the state's rural non-Interstate roads is disproportionately higher than that on all other roads in the state (2.69 fatalities per 100 million miles of travel vs. 0.65).
- Motor vehicle crashes in which roadway design was likely a contributing factor cost North Carolina motorists \$3 billion per year in medical costs, lost productivity, travel delays, workplace costs, insurance costs and legal costs.
- Where appropriate, highway improvements such as removing or shielding obstacles, adding or improving medians, widening lanes and shoulders, upgrading roads from two lanes to four lanes, and improving road markings and traffic signals can reduce traffic fatalities and accidents and improve traffic flow to help relieve congestion.
- According to a study conducted by the Federal Highway Administration, \$100 million spent on highway safety improvements will save 145 lives over a 10-year period.

Data from the U.S. Census, the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration, the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the Congressional Budget Office, AASHTO and the Texas Transportation Institute was compiled and analyzed by TRIP, a nonprofit transportation research group based in Washington, D.C. Information is the latest available.

