

Road and bridge problems costly for Georgians, study says

By **WALTER C. JONES - MORRIS NEWS SERVICE**

ATLANTA | Georgia drivers pay an extra \$7.9 billion yearly for the problems with roads and bridges across the state, according to a report released Wednesday by transportation advocates.

That comes to \$742 for every Athens driver, \$1,259 for every Augusta driver and \$1,800 for every Savannah driver.

The report was prepared for TRIP, a Washington-based organization funded by construction, labor and engineering outfits. It was distributed by the Georgia Chamber of Commerce's Transportation Alliance and the AAA auto club.

"This is too much for Georgians in dollars and in terms of lives," said Garrett Townsend, spokesman for AAA of Georgia.

The study used engineering estimates of the wear on cars and tires based on estimates of road conditions statewide and in Georgia's seven largest metro areas. It also calculated a value for time lost due to traffic congestion and each area's annual fatalities.

It did not make any projections on how those costs could rise in the future due to scaled-back maintenance and construction because of funding pressure.

The Georgia Department of Transportation no longer has enough money to repave each road every 10 years and now is on a schedule to resurface them only once every 50 years. And it won't be awarding contracts for new projects until the spring, compared to a dozen or so per month in previous years.

"When we talk about transportation, it's a means to an end. It's economic development," said Seth Millican, director of the Georgia Transportation Alliance.

Legislation is pending in the House Transportation Committee to add close to \$1 billion to yearly transportation spending by taking some of it from money used now for other parts of state government and by taking some from taxes cities, counties and schools use for their own operations. Local officials are generally opposed to the bill as are many conservatives who call it a state tax increase.

"It's like taking care of your house," said Rocky Moretti, TRIP's director of research. "If you invest in it, it will save you money in the long run."

Follow Walter Jones on Twitter @MorrisNews and Facebook or contact him at walter.jones@morris.com.