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MICHIGAN’S ECONOMIC RECOVERY COULD BE JEOPARDIZED BY TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM CHALLENGES, INCLUDING DETERIORATED ROADS & BRIDGES, NEEDED SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS AND A LACK OF TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

Eds.: The report includes data regarding pavement and bridge condition, congestion, highway safety, economic development and funding.

Grand Rapids, MI – Michigan’s transportation system faces mounting challenges in the form of deteriorated roads and bridges, a lack of adequate safety features, highway bottlenecks and an inability to fund projects needed to support economic development opportunities in the state. Increased investment in transportation improvements at the local, state and federal levels could improve road and bridge conditions, boost safety, increase roadway efficiency and support long-term economic growth in Michigan, according to a new report released today by TRIP, a Washington, DC based national transportation organization.

The TRIP report, “Michigan’s Top Transportation Challenges: Meeting the State’s Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility,” finds that pavement conditions are projected to deteriorate significantly over the next decade under current transportation funding levels. And while the state has made progress in reducing the share of deficient bridges in recent years, the share of deficient bridges is expected to increase in the coming years due to a lack of funding. Failure to make needed improvements to Michigan’s transportation system could threaten the state’s economic recovery.

The percentage of Michigan’s major roads that are in poor condition increased significantly in recent years, from 23 percent in 2006 to 38 percent in 2014. By 2025, the share of major roads in poor condition is projected to increase to 53 percent. Driving on rough roads costs Michigan motorists a total of $4.8 billion each year in the form of extra vehicle operating costs, an average of $686 annually per motorist. These costs include accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs, and increased fuel consumption and tire wear.

Michigan has made progress in recent years in reducing the share of bridges that are structurally deficient. However, under current funding levels, the share of structurally deficient bridges is expected to increase. The percentage of structurally deficient bridges decreased from 16 percent in 2006 to 12 percent in 2014. By 2023, the share of structurally deficient bridges is projected to increase to 14 percent. Bridges that are structurally deficient have significant deterioration of the bridge deck, superstructure or substructure. Sixteen percent of Michigan’s bridges are functionally obsolete, an increase from 2006,
when 12 percent were functionally obsolete. Bridges that are functionally obsolete no longer meet modern design standards, often because of narrow lanes, inadequate clearances or poor alignment.

“We are allocating far too many resources towards patching potholes and providing other temporary repairs to maintain safety when we should be investing in long-term improvements,” said Steve Warren, Kent County Road Commission managing director. “Without a funding solution, our roads will continue to deteriorate at a faster pace than improvements can be made, and the price tag to make the necessary improvements will only continue to grow.”

Traffic crashes in Michigan claimed the lives of 4,587 people between 2009 and 2013, an average of 917 fatalities each year. And Michigan’s rural non-Interstate roads have significantly higher rates of fatal crashes, with a traffic fatality rate of 1.76 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel, nearly two-and-a-half times the 0.75 fatality rate on all other roads and highways in the state.

“Michigan drivers have a unique opportunity to address our deficient roads and bridges in a few weeks,” said Denise Donohue, director of the County Road Association of Michigan. “Proposal 1 will add $1.2 billion to road funding, and it will be constitutionally dedicated to roads. We won’t fully recover from our current band-aid approach to roads for several years, but passing Proposal 1 puts us on the right path.”

Michigan’s economic recovery is threatened by increased road and bridge deterioration, freight bottlenecks and the lack of needed transportation improvements to serve economic development. The efficiency and condition of Michigan’s transportation system, particularly its highways, is critical to the health of the state’s economy. Annually, $520 billion in goods are shipped throughout Michigan, mostly by truck. The amount of freight, measured by weight, shipped annually throughout Michigan is expected to increase by 25 percent from 2015 to 2030, putting further stress on the state’s roads, highways and bridges.

The efficiency of freight delivery and personal travel in Michigan is being compromised by six significant highway bottlenecks. Relieving congestion at these bottlenecks will require significant investment to improve traffic flow at these locations. The top six highway bottlenecks in Michigan include the following: I-94 at I-75 and I-75 at I-696 in the Detroit area; I-96 at US 131 in the Grand Rapids area; I-69 at I-96 and I-96 at US 127 in the Lansing area; and I-94 at I-69 in the Port Huron area.

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.

“Michigan’s road and bridge conditions are only going to get worse if greater funding is not made available at the local, state and federal levels,” said Will Wilkins, TRIP’s executive director. “Michigan has made tremendous strides to recover from a devastating economic downturn, but the deteriorating condition of the state’s roads and bridges threatens the state’s future economic growth.”

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