NEW REPORT IDENTIFIES NEW MEXICO’S TOP 25 TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES AND NEEDED FIXES, INCLUDING DETERIORATED AND CONGESTED ROADWAYS, DEFICIENT BRIDGES, INADEQUATE TRANSIT AND NEEDED SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

Albuquerque, New Mexico – Deficient roads, highways, bridges, transit systems and crowded or congested routes in New Mexico are posing mounting challenges to the state’s residents, visitors and businesses in the form of traffic congestion, reduced economic productivity as a result of inadequate transportation capacity, road and bridge deterioration, and a lack of adequate roadway safety. This is according to a new report released today by TRIP, a Washington, DC based national transportation research organization.

The report, “New Mexico’s Top 25 Transportation Challenges and the Improvements Needed to Address Them,” identifies New Mexico’s top transportation challenges, including the need to provide improvements to critical routes that have a multitude of needs ranging from addressing pavement deterioration, inadequate roadway or transit capacity, deficient bridges, and a lack of adequate safety features. A lack of adequate transportation funding is the constraining factor in developing and delivering these needed improvements.

The top 10 transportation challenges in the state, as identified by the TRIP report, are as follows. Additional details for all 25 transportation challenges can be found in the report’s Appendix.

1. **Need for construction of US 82 as a two-lane enhanced highway in Eddy & Lea Counties.** This $180 million project would construct 86 miles of four-lane roadway (including frontage roads) in Eddy and Lea Counties. This route would help accommodate the growing heavy oil field traffic in the area.

2. **The Reconstruction and widening of I-25 in Bernalillo County.** This $26 million project would reconstruct and widen 1.6 miles of I-25 in Bernalillo County (including the existing bridges) from NM 314 to Isleta Pueblo.

3. **New bridge construction on US 70 in Las Cruces.** This $30 million project would include new bridge construction on US 70 in Las Cruces, as well as expanding the roadway to six-lanes and improving lighting, signalization and intersections. These improvements would ease the heavy congestion on this major connector between East Mesa, NASA, White Sands Missile Range and Las Cruces.

4. **US 64 reconstruction in San Juan County.** This $50 million project would reconstruct four miles of US 64 to enhance safety, add capacity and improve access control.

5. **US 54 bridge replacement near Logan.** This $25 million project would replace the Canadian River Bridge Crossing on US 54. The existing bridge has reached the end of its design life and has significant rust and corrosion. US 54 carries significant heavy truck travel and is the only direct route to Logan and Ute Lake State Park from Tucumcari. The detour route around this bridge is over 100 miles in length.

6. **Need for Rapid Transit Study along Paseo del Norte corridor in Albuquerque.** This study would evaluate a Rapid Transit System, which could possibly be a Bus Rapid Transit System, along the Paseo del Norte corridor in order to link the northwestern portion of the Albuquerque metro area with the Journal Center and other activity centers east of the Rio Grande. This could help to alleviate congestion, making travel times more predictable for private automobiles as well as transit. This project could meet the region’s growing demand for river crossing trips, serve the large number of commuters, and accommodate projected population growth.

7. **Reconstruction and intersection improvements to NM 136 in Dona Ana County.** This $40 million project would include a full reconstruction and intersection improvements to nine miles of NM 136. This route is the
only direct connection between Santa Teresa Port of Entry and I-10. The improvements are needed to accommodate industrial and commercial growth in the area.

8. **Reconstruction of I-25/Rio Bravo Interchange in Albuquerque.** This $37 million project would reconstruct the I-25/Rio Bravo Interchange in Albuquerque to address deterioration and relieve traffic congestion by improving the efficiency of the interchange.

9. **Development of Santa Fe Transit Center.** This project would construct a multi-modal center for the southern hub of the Santa Fe Trails Transit System in Santa Fe, which carries more than 1,000,000 riders annually. As the metro area continues to grow to the south and west, the transit center would create a formal multi-modal center that is positioned to connect important transit routes to the south and north.

10. **Bus Rapid Transit Study along Central Avenue in Albuquerque.** This project would provide a combination of dedicated busway and mixed flow lanes within the current right-of-way on the Central Corridor from I-40 and Tramway Boulevard to I-40 and Artisco Vista. This corridor is a key connector of transit destinations.

According to the TRIP report, 23 percent of New Mexico’s major urban roads are in poor condition, 41 percent are in mediocre or fair condition and 36 percent are in good condition. Seven percent of bridges are structurally deficient, meaning they have significant deterioration of the bridge deck, supports or other major components. An additional nine percent of the state’s bridges are functionally obsolete. These bridges no longer meet modern design standards, often because of narrow lanes, inadequate clearances or poor alignment.

“The impact of road conditions on the trucking industry is measured in more than just dollars and cents,” said Johnny Johnson, managing director of the New Mexico Trucking Association. Equipment repairs and delayed delivery of goods resulting from deteriorating and unsafe highways and bridges are indirect costs that cannot be quantified.”

New Mexico’s overall traffic fatality rate of 1.24 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel in 2013 is significantly higher than the national average of 1.09. A total of 1,735 people died on New Mexico’s highways from 2009 through 2013, an average of 347 annually.

“The Albuquerque Hispano Chamber of Commerce supports the need to draw greater attention to the importance of a sustained, long-term investment in New Mexico’s transportation infrastructure as outlined in the TRIP Report,” said Carlo Lucero, chair of the Government Affairs Committee for the Albuquerque Hispano Chamber. “Making needed improvements to New Mexico’s roads, highways, bridges and transit systems will provide a significant boost to the state’s economy by stimulating short and long-term economic growth.”

Enhancing critical segments of New Mexico’s transportation system will boost the state’s 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. Sustaining New Mexico’s long-term economic growth and maintaining the state’s quality of life will require increased investment in expanding the capacity of the state’s transportation system, which will enhance business productivity and support short- and long-term job creation in the state.

“Investing in New Mexico’s transportation system and addressing these challenges by improving the condition and efficiency of the state’s roads, bridges and transit systems will be an effective step in boosting the state’s economy, enhancing quality of life and making New Mexico an attractive place to live, work and visit,” said Will Wilkins, executive director of TRIP.