

New report paints bleak picture in Conn.

Highway, bridge improvements needed, but funding is hard to come by
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Nearly half of Connecticut's major roads are in need of repair, a third of the state's bridges are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete, the rural traffic fatality rate is double that on other roads, and more than half of the state's roads are congested during peak travel times. However, the state lacks adequate funding to make needed improvements to its surface transportation system. This is according to a new report released July 29 by TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based national transportation organization. TRIP's report finds that increased investment in the state's transportation infrastructure could improve road and bridge conditions, ease congestion, enhance safety and support long-term economic growth in the state.

The report, "Future Mobility in Connecticut: Meeting the State's Needs for Safe and Efficient Mobility," finds that 13% of the state's major roadways are in poor condition and an additional 32% are in mediocre condition. In addition to deteriorated road conditions, 9% of Connecticut's bridges are structurally deficient and an additional 25% are functionally obsolete. The state's roads also are becoming increasingly crowded, as commuting and commerce are constrained by growing traffic congestion on Connecticut's major urban roads. In 2008, 58% of the state's urban highways were congested during peak travel times.

"This report is a call to action to put transportation planning on the long-term agenda. We can't fix the problems overnight, but the state's overall economic vitality is in the crosshairs of doing nothing or having vision for the future," said Sen. Bob

Duff, vice-chairman of the Connecticut General Assembly's Transportation Committee. "The time has come to tackle our transportation shortcomings and improve the day-to-day lives of our constituents."

According to TRIP estimates, Connecticut's roadways that lack some desirable safety features, have inadequate capacity to meet travel demands or have poor pavement conditions cost the state's drivers approximately \$2.7 billion annually in the form of traffic crashes, additional vehicle operating costs and congestion-related delays. TRIP calculates that driving on inadequate roadways costs the average motorists in the Bridgeport and Stamford areas \$1,270 annually, while the cost to the average motorist in the Hartford area is \$1,119 each year and \$1,074 for the average New Haven driver.

"TRIP's report demonstrates the heavy reliance Connecticut has on federal transportation funding and the need to effectively plan for future transportation needs today. With a long list of expensive highway and transit projects already on the agenda, it is clear that state and federal revenues for these important services must be secured," said Sen. Donald DeFronzo, chairman of the Connecticut General Assembly's Transportation Committee.

The TRIP report contains a list of needed transportation projects throughout the state that would repair and replace deficient bridges, increase roadway capacity and improve the state's transit system. However, these projects cannot move forward without additional transportation funding. Needed

surface transportation projects in Connecticut that would require significant federal funding to proceed include the reconstruction of S.H. 15 from Fairfield to Trumbull, bridge replacements, improving interchanges and ramps on I-95 in Norwalk from U.S. 7 to Exit 14, replacing the bridges and approach on I-95 in New Haven over the Quinnipiac River and New Haven Harbor, reconstructing and widening I-84 in Waterbury from Silver Street to Pierpont Road, and improvements to the New Britain-Hartford Busway. A full list of needed projects is included in the report.

"Transportation is the No. 1 concern of the business community. If businesses cannot move their goods, products and employees in Fairfield County, they will move out of Connecticut," said Jack Condlin, president and CEO of the Stamford Chamber of Commerce. "In this economy, the state legislators need to recognize that a sound transportation system will be a lynchpin for growth."

Last year's federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided approximately \$302 million in stimulus funding for highway and bridge improvements and \$137 million for public-transit improvements in Connecticut. This funding has served as an important down payment on needed road, highway, bridge and transit improvements but is not sufficient to allow the state to proceed with numerous projects needed to modernize its surface transportation system.

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