



Birmingham roads and bridges receive sub-par report card

State faces \$6.9 billion shortfall in transportation funds

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The Birmingham area receives grades of “F” for traffic safety and transportation funding, according to a new report released today by TRIP, a national nonprofit transportation research group. TRIP’s report also assigns grades of “C-” to road conditions and congestion in the area, and rates bridge conditions a “C”.

The report, entitled “Making the Grade in Alabama: An Analysis of the Ability of Alabama’s Transportation System to Meet the State’s Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility,” finds that the Birmingham area averages 85 traffic fatalities each year, and has a traffic fatality rate of 12.8 fatalities per 100,000 population. On average, more than 1,100 people are killed on Alabama’s roads each year, and the state’s rate of 2.0 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel is 42% higher than the national average if 1.41.

Because numerous critical transportation projects in Birmingham will not move forward without additional funding—including improvements to I-59, I-65, I-459 and the Northern Beltline—the Birmingham region was assigned a grade of “F” for transportation funding. The TRIP report finds that the state currently faces a \$6.9 billion shortfall from 2008 to 2017 in highway transportation funding for needed projects. The Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) estimates that from 2008 to 2017, approximately \$16.2 billion is needed to allow the state to significantly improve road and bridge conditions, make reasonable roadway safety improvements and address needed traffic congestion relief. However, anticipated funding levels from 2008 to 2017 will be only \$9.3 billion.

“We are encouraged by the TRIP report which affirms the current needs and will be material to the ongoing discussion. The Birmingham Regional Chamber of Commerce has a long standing position of support for investment in public infrastructure throughout the region. Understanding that Congress will appropriate funds for a significant investment in infrastructure as part of the upcoming economic stimulus program, we hope to receive adequate funding for our ‘ready to go’ projects,” said Russell Cunningham, CEO and President of the Birmingham Regional Chamber of Commerce. “We encourage Congress to also provide sufficient funding for the region’s transit and roads needs in the Federal Transportation Bill slated to be passed in 2009.”

The TRIP report also assigns a grade of ‘C-’ to road conditions in Birmingham, noting that 13% of major roads in the region are in poor condition and an additional 17 percent are in mediocre condition. Included in the report is a list of 10 segments of deteriorated roadway in the area that are most in need of repair or replacement. Statewide, five percent of Alabama’s roads are in poor condition and eight percent are in mediocre condition. Driving on roads that are in need of repair costs the average Birmingham motorist \$280 annually in extra vehicle operating costs, including accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs and increased fuel consumption and tire wear. Statewide, Alabama’s motorists lose an additional \$601 million each year as a result of driving on roads in need of repair.

Congestion levels in Birmingham also earn the area a grade of ‘C-’, as the average rush hour trip takes approximately 15% longer to complete than during non-rush hour times. The TRIP report pinpoints 10 of the most congested segments of roadway in Birmingham, including two sections of US-280, three segments of I-65 and three congested areas on I-20. A recent report by the Reason Foundation projects that, unless significant highway improvements are made, travel delays in Birmingham will double by 2030, reaching congestion levels currently experienced in Boston or Philadelphia. According to the TRIP report, 52% of Alabama’s major urban roadways are considered congested during peak travel hours.

The TRIP report finds that 5% of bridges in the Birmingham area are rated as structurally deficient, showing significant deterioration to decks and other major components. An additional 18% of the region’s bridges are functionally obsolete. These bridges do not meet modern design standards or are no longer adequate for the volume of traffic that they carry.

“Alabama’s economy is literally riding on its transportation system. Birmingham’s residents and businesses depend on an efficient, well-maintained and adequately funded transportation system to help foster progress and economic development and make Birmingham an attractive place to live, visit and do business,” said William M. Wilkins, TRIP’s executive director.

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