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*National contacts:*  
*Daisy Singh, American Highway Users Alliance,*  
*202-857-1200*  
*Frank Moretti, TRIP, 202-262-0714*  
*Justin McNaull, AAA, 202-942-2079*

## **SEASONAL BOTTLENECKS CRIMP SUMMER TRAVEL PLANS; CONGESTION SLOWING DOWN TRIPS TO FAVORITE VACATION SPOTS FOR MILLIONS OF AMERICANS**

*Eds.: A list of each bottleneck for the 25 summer tourist destinations with high levels of traffic delays as a result of bottlenecks can be found in Appendix A.*

**WASHINGTON, June 30, 2005** – Summer traffic bottlenecks are forcing families to spend more time getting to their favorite recreational areas and less time enjoying their vacations, according to a new report released today by a coalition of national transportation, travel, and motorist advocacy groups.

The study, “Are We There Yet? A Report on Summer Traffic Bottlenecks and Steps Needed to Ensure that Our Favorite Vacation Destinations Remain Accessible,” lists the 25 summer tourist destinations with the highest level of delays caused by traffic bottlenecks in the United States. Traffic bottlenecks are sections of roads or highways and bridges that lack adequate capacity to handle peak traffic loads during periods of high demand. Bottlenecks can choke traffic, delaying motorists, causing crashes, wasting fuel, emitting unnecessary pollutants, and taking time away from daytrips or vacations.

The 10 summer tourist destinations with the worst summer traffic delays resulting from traffic bottlenecks are:

1. The Oregon Coast
2. Tidewater region of Virginia
3. Maryland/Delaware shore
4. Branson, Mo.
5. Outer Banks of North Carolina
6. Cape Cod, Mass.
7. New Jersey shore
8. Napa Valley, Calif.
9. Pennsylvania Dutch and Amish Country
10. Catskill Mountains region in New York

Travel delays on roads leading to urban tourist attractions – like the large theme parks near Orlando – were not included in this report, because it was not possible to separate tourism and commuting traffic in the analysis conducted for this report.

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The report was prepared by American Highway Users Alliance, AAA, and TRIP, a national transportation research group. The technical research and compilation of data was performed by Cambridge Systematics.

“This study is a follow-up to our report on the most congested commuter bottlenecks in the country and is the first-of-its-kind effort to examine trends in recreational and tourist trips, which have become a significant part of vehicle travel in the U.S.,” said Greg Cohen, President and CEO, American Highway Users Alliance. “Like the urban congestion that frustrates commuters daily, seasonal bottlenecks are slowing down vacationers and making trips to our country’s beautiful recreation areas more of a hassle. In our fast-paced society, vacation time is increasingly valuable and families deserve better than spending hours in traffic on the drive to their vacation spots.”

The 2005 summer travel season is expected to be the nation’s busiest summer travel vacation period ever, with 328 million leisure trips (trips for recreation of at least 50 miles) expected to occur during the summer of 2005 – an increase of 2.3 percent from the previous summer. The upcoming July Fourth holiday weekend will have more American vacationers on the road – 33.9 million, according to AAA’s holiday travel forecast – than even Thanksgiving.

“Many Americans encounter more traffic on their summer vacations than they do while commuting to work,” said Susan Pikrallidas, Vice President of Public Affairs for AAA, the nation’s largest motoring and leisure travel organization. “This vacation congestion cuts into our leisure time, endangers our families’ safety while in the car, and could ultimately convince some Americans to avoid traveling. Many vacation road trips now require a little too much time on the road.”

“Seasonal traffic congestion will get much worse unless road and bridge improvements are made at these bottlenecks,” said TRIP Executive Director Will Wilkins. “Tourism continues to increase and rural communities, particularly those that enjoy access to desirable recreational features, continue to experience significant population gains. Given the importance of tourism and recreation to our economy, we cannot afford to allow access to some of our favorite vacation spots to become choked with traffic.”

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Congress is currently deliberating over a new multi-year reauthorization of the federal transportation bill that will increase funding for road and bridge improvements through 2009. It is almost two years since the last transportation bill expired in September 2003 and Congress has passed several short-term extensions of the old program. Today, the seventh such extension expires as legislators and the White House work toward an agreement for a new long-term bill.

“Congress has the chance to do something about congestion for future summer travelers by passing a new transportation bill that increases funding for safety and mobility, reduces red-tape and promotes engineering innovation,” Cohen said. “We need the transportation bill signed into law now to get projects underway nationwide that will ease congestion at these seasonal bottlenecks.”

**Additional findings of the report:**

- The summer is traditionally the busiest vacation season of the year, with 33 percent of all leisure travel in the United States occurring during the summer months.
- When Americans go on vacation, they are most likely to travel by private vehicle. For vacation trips of 100 miles or longer in the United States, one way, 85 percent of trips are taken by private vehicles, 12 percent are taken by airplane and the remaining three percent are taken by other means, including rental cars and trains.
- Going on vacation is big business in the United States. Total travel and tourism expenditures in the United States by domestic and foreign visitors are expected to be \$633 billion in 2005, supporting 7.3 million jobs during the year.
- Work-related travel accounts for only 18 percent of all trips in the United States. Social and recreational travel accounts for 27 percent of all trips in the United States.
- Traffic volume, measured by the amount of traffic per-lane-mile, is actually increasing faster on rural roads than on major urban roads. Most of the routes leading to the nation’s favorite summer tourist destinations are rural. From 1990 to 2002, traffic per-lane-mile on major rural roads increased by 29 percent compared to an 18 percent increase on major urban roads.
- Congested roads are particularly vulnerable to significant traffic delays if there is a vehicle crash, severe weather or a lane is closed for construction.

**Cooperation among motorists and transportation agencies is needed to help relieve traffic congestion related to summer tourism travel. The following are suggestions to help people minimize delays as they travel to their favorite vacation destinations during the summer months.**

- Drivers should try to avoid peak travel periods, access latest travel information, consider alternatives to driving or, if they must travel during peak times, allow ample time to reach a destination.
- Transportation agencies should take steps to improve the efficiency of a road or highway, minimize traffic construction delays, improve traveler information and expand key road and highway capacity leading to key summer tourist destinations.

*The American Highway Users Alliance is a nonprofit organization advocating in the interests of motorists – whether they travel by automobile, truck, bus, motorcycle or RV – and businesses that depend on good roads. The group promotes policies that make highway travel safe and congestion-free.*

*AAA is a not-for-profit, fully taxpaying federation of automobile clubs and full service travel agencies in the U.S. and Canada. With over 48 million members, the organization serves as an advocate for motorists and travelers.*

*TRIP is a nonprofit transportation research organization that promotes transportation policies that relieve traffic congestion, improve air quality, make highway travel safer and enhance economic productivity.*