Our Nation’s Terrible Roads Are Costing Drivers $800 A Year

By Annie-Rose Strasser on October 4, 2013

Looking at the Congressional dysfunction that results from trying to pass a budget, it’s no surprise that there’s no money around to repair our nation’s roads. It has been four years since Congress passed and the president signed a transportation budget, and the Federal Highway Administration estimates that roads need about $170 billion to get up-to-date. That cost, it turns out, is being passed on to consumers.

Whether they realize it or not, drivers are shelling out as much as $800 a year (PDF) thanks to the terrible condition of the nation’s roads, according to a new report from the National Transportation Research Group TRIP. It’s not an outright cost but a translated one: money they wouldn’t otherwise be spending on vehicle maintenance (thanks to things like potholes) and fuel (from the drag of driving on a rough road).

The average urban driver is paying $377 a year on these costs, but they also vary greatly depending on where you live. In urban areas, 27 percent of major roads are in “substandard condition” and another 27 percent are in “mediocre condition.” When rural routes are factored in, 14 percent of the roads in the US are in “poor” condition, 19 are “mediocre,” and 17 are “fair.”

But not even all urban areas have equal impact on the wallet. This chart breaks down which areas have the most roads in “poor” condition (% POOR) and where drivers are paying the most for their vehicle maintenance and fuel:

Currently, the government shutdown has brought transportation funding down to exactly zero, and such funding hasn’t been brought up at all during the ongoing budget debate. But roads and bridges serve as the veins through which nearly all of American business is pumped, and their demise is significant for the economy overall; a lack of investment of infrastructure costs businesses $1 trillion in sales. What’s more, infrastructure investment creates something both people and the economy sorely need: jobs. In 2010, Republicans blocked a jobs bill largely focused on infrastructure that would have created as many as 2.6 million jobs.