WASHINGTON'S TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES INCLUDE DETERIORATED ROADS AND BRIDGES, INCREASINGLY CONGESTED AND CROWDED HIGHWAYS & TRANSIT, NEEDED SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS, AND A LACK OF FUNDING FOR NUMEROUS NEEDED PROJECTS, WHICH COULD STIFLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Eds.: The report includes lists of deteriorated bridges throughout Washington, a list of needed but unfunded transportation projects, and data regarding pavement and bridge condition, congestion, highway safety, economic development and funding.

Richland, WA – Washington’s transportation system faces mounting challenges in the form of deteriorated roads and bridges, increasingly congested and crowded highways and transit systems, a need for additional roadway safety improvements, and a lack of funding to proceed with numerous needed transportation improvements, threatening the state’s quality of life and economic vitality. Increased investment in transportation improvements at the local, state and federal levels could improve road and bridge conditions, boost safety, increase roadway efficiency and support long-term economic growth in Washington, according to a new report released today by TRIP, a Washington, DC based national transportation organization.

According to the TRIP report, “Washington’s Top Transportation Challenges: Meeting the State’s Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility and Economic Vitality,” approximately one-third of the state’s locally and state-maintained urban pavements and more than one-fifth of major locally and state-maintained rural pavements are in poor condition. Over the next decade, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) faces a $1.8 billion backlog in funds needed for pavement preservation. Because of the lack of funding, the share of state-maintained roads in need of resurfacing or reconstruction is projected to quadruple by 2025. Driving on rough roads costs Washington motorists a total of $2.9 billion each year in the form of extra vehicle operating costs - $551 annually per driver. These costs include accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs, and increased fuel consumption and tire wear.

Washington’s bridges are also increasingly deteriorated. Five percent of Washington’s locally and state-maintained bridges are structurally deficient, meaning they have significant deterioration of the bridge deck, supports or other major components. These bridges are often posted for lower weights or closed to traffic restricting or redirecting large vehicles, including commercial trucks and emergency response vehicles. An additional 21 percent of Washington’s locally and state-maintained bridges are functionally obsolete. Bridges that are functionally obsolete no longer meet current design standards, often because of narrow lanes, inadequate clearances or poor alignment. According to WSDOT, 110 state-maintained bridges that are currently rated in poor condition are expected to remain in poor condition through 2020, due to a lack of funding. WSDOT also projects that 41
state-maintained bridges currently rated in fair or good condition, are expected to deteriorate to poor condition by 2020 due to a lack of funding. The TRIP report details state-maintained bridges throughout the state that are currently structurally deficient. A list of structurally deficient bridges throughout Washington can be found in Appendix A of the report.

Congestion on the state’s roadways and ridership on the transit network are increasing, particularly in the Puget Sound area, where nearly 98 percent of delay hours occur. Congestion-related delays cost Washington’s drivers and businesses $858 million annually. The TRIP report identifies the 15 most congested commuting routes in the state.

"The Tri-Cities Region continues to be the fastest-growing metropolitan area in Washington, said Troy Berglund, Tri-Cities Legislative Council. Our region needs a transportation package that invests in all parts of our state and enacts much-needed reforms. Projects like the Red Mountain I-82 Interchange near West Richland, Lewis Street Overpass in Pasco, U.S. 395/Ridgeline Intersection in Kennewick and Duportail Bridge in Richland are desperately needed and would have a combined economic impact of more than $1 billion within 20 years of their completion."

Without a significant boost in transportation funding at the local, state and federal level, the condition and efficiency of Washington’s surface transportation system will decline. Many needed transportation improvements may not be completed without additional funds. The TRIP report identifies the needed transportation projects throughout the state that are unable to move forward without additional funding. Needed but unfunded projects in the Tri-Cities area include the construction of a roundabout at the SR/224/SR 225 and I-82 ramp terminals.

Traffic crashes in Washington claimed the lives of 2,280 people between 2009 and 2013, an average of 456 fatalities each year. The state’s overall traffic fatality rate of 0.76 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel is lower than the national average of 1.09. Washington’s rural non-Interstate roads have significantly higher rates of fatal crashes, with a traffic fatality rate of 1.76 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel, nearly three-and-a-half times the 0.52 fatality rate on all other roads and highways in the state.

The efficiency and condition of Washington’s transportation system, particularly its highways, is critical to the health of the state’s economy. In 2012, $181 billion in goods was shipped from sites in Washington to sites outside the state, $169 billion worth of goods was shipped into the state and $253 billion of freight was shipped within the state, mostly by truck. Fifty-eight percent of the goods shipped annually in Washington are carried by trucks and another 20 percent are carried by courier services or multiple mode deliveries, which include trucking.

“The condition and efficiency of Washington’s transportation system will worsen dramatically in the coming years if greater funding is not made available at the local, state and federal levels,” said Will Wilkins, TRIP’s executive director. “Without an efficient, well-maintained transportation system, Washington could miss out on opportunities for economic growth and residents could face a reduced quality of life.”

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