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U.S. INTERSTATE SYSTEM TURNS 50 YEARS OLD, REMAINS NATION'S MOST CRITICAL TRANSPORTATION LINK, DESPITE GROWING TRAFFIC CONGESTION, WHICH IS LIKELY TO GET WORSE UNLESS NATION COMMITS TO NEW VISION OF A 21ST CENTURY HIGHWAY SYSTEM

INTERSTATE SYSTEM CONTINUES TO SAVE LIVES, TIME AND MONEY – VALUED AT \$2,500 ANNUALLY, PER PERSON NATIONALLY -- BUT BENEFITS ARE LIKELY TO ERODE IN FUTURE WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS

Washington, D.C. - June 29, 2006 – For the last 50 years, the Interstate Highway System has remained the most critical link in the United State's transportation network, saving the nation \$737 billion annually - \$2,510 per person- in safety benefits, saved time, reduced fuel and lower consumer costs. But the benefits of the Interstate Highway System are likely to erode unless the U.S. is able to make significant improvements to its most critical highway network to accommodate the tremendous increase in the demand for efficient, safe travel, according to a new report released today by TRIP, a national nonprofit transportation research group.

The TRIP report, entitled "*Saving Lives, Time and Money: A report on the condition, impact, use and future needs of the Interstate Highway System,*" estimates that the additional safety features of the Interstate Highway System have saved approximately 234,000 lives nationwide since 1956.

"America's Interstate Highway System has provided tremendous safety, time and economic benefits over the last 50 years. But without an additional investment in maintaining and expanding the system, some of those benefits may begin to slip away," said William M. Wilkins, TRIP's executive director.

Travel on the nation's Interstate highways is increasing at a rate eight times faster than additional lane miles are being added, the report found. From 1990 to 2004, vehicle travel on the Interstate System increased by 51 percent and lane capacity increased by six percent. As a result, the average amount of Interstate traffic per-lane-mile increased by 42 percent between 1990 and 2004.

According to TRIP, 41 percent of the nation's urban Interstates are considered congested because they carry traffic levels that result in significant delays during peak travel hours. An additional 10 percent of rural Interstates are also considered congested. Five percent of the nation's Interstate bridges are rated structurally deficient and 16 percent are rated functionally obsolete. Seventeen percent of Interstate pavements are in poor or mediocre condition. Sixteen percent are in fair condition and the remaining 67 percent are rated in good condition.

Because it reduces travel times and provides more direct routes, the Interstate system saves the average American 70 hours of travel time annually - 20 billion hours nationwide. The Interstate system also reduces statewide motor fuel consumption by 9.7 billion gallons annually.

The nation faces a significant challenge in maintaining and rebuilding its aging Interstate Highway System and providing additional lane capacity to meet growing travel demand. Travel on Interstate highways is expected to increase by 60 percent by the year 2026. Interstate traffic congestion is expected to worsen substantially unless additional lanes are added to the system. By 2026, if additional capacity is not added to the Interstate Highway System, 76 percent of urban Interstates will be congested and 38 percent of rural Interstates will be congested.

According to the TRIP report, if Interstate funding levels continue to increase annually at their current rate, the United States will spend \$78 billion less than is needed to maintain current Interstate physical conditions and traffic congestion levels and \$358 billion less than is needed to make significant improvements in conditions and traffic congestion levels through 2026.

Additional findings of the TRIP report:

- The estimated spending on Interstate repairs and improvements in 2006 is 82 percent of the level needed to maintain current physical conditions on Interstate highways and bridges and maintain traffic congestion at its current level.
- The estimated spending on Interstate repairs and improvements in 2006 is approximately half – 49 percent – the level needed to make significant improvements in the physical condition of Interstate bridges and highways and to reduce current Interstate traffic congestion levels.
- The Interstate Highway System, which includes three percent of all roadway lane miles, carries 24 percent of all vehicle travel in the nation.
- Since funding of the Interstate system was approved in 1956, vehicle miles of travel in the U.S. has increased by 373 percent, the number of vehicles in the nation has increased by 236 percent and the nation's population has jumped by 75 percent.