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ARKANSAS' INTERSTATE SYSTEM TURNS 50 YEARS OLD, REMAINS CRITICAL LINK IN STATE'S TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM, SAVING EACH ARKANSAS RESIDENT MORE THAN \$1,600 ANNUALLY IN SAFETY BENEFITS, SAVED TIME, REDUCED FUEL AND LOWER CONSUMER COSTS

BENEFITS OF INTERSTATE SYSTEM MAY ERODE IN THE FUTURE UNLESS STATE CAN FUND NEEDED INTERSTATE REPAIRS AND IMPROVEMENTS

Little Rock, June 29, 2006 – For the last 50 years, Arkansas' Interstate Highway System has remained the most critical link in the state's transportation network, saving Arkansas residents \$4.5 billion annually - \$1,629 per person- in safety benefits, saved time, reduced fuel and lower consumer costs. But some of the benefits of Arkansas' Interstate Highway System may erode unless the state can secure additional funds for needed maintenance and widening projects, 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 Arkansas' Interstate Highway System," estimates that the additional safety features of the Interstate Highway System have saved approximately 2,600 lives in Arkansas since 1956. In addition to saving lives, improved traffic safety provided by the Interstate system saves each Arkansas resident \$120 annually (\$329 million statewide) in reduced healthcare costs and costs associated with lost productivity due to traffic crashes. Arkansas' Interstate Highway System also saves the average resident \$535 annually (\$1.5 billion statewide) in the value of saved time and fuel, and saves \$974 per resident (\$2.7 billion statewide) in reduced consumer costs for apparel, food, housing and transportation.

"Arkansas' Interstates have provided tremendous safety, time and economic benefits over the last 50 years. But without an additional investment in maintaining and expanding the system, the state may see some of those benefits slip away," said William M. Wilkins, TRIP's executive director.

According to the TRIP report, 50 percent of Arkansas' urban Interstates are considered congested because they carry traffic levels that result in significant delays during peak travel hours.

An additional 36 percent of the state's rural Interstates are congested. Between 1990 and 2004, vehicle travel on Arkansas' Interstates increased by 90 percent, while lane miles on the system only increased by 20 percent. By 2026, unless additional capacity is added to the system, 96 percent of Arkansas' urban Interstate highways and 77 percent of its rural Interstate highways will be congested.

Because it reduces travel times and provides more direct routes, the Interstate system saves each Arkansas resident 33 hours of travel time annually - 92 million hours statewide. Arkansas' Interstate system annually reduces statewide motor fuel consumption by 44 million gallons.

Arkansas has done a good job of rebuilding its aging Interstate system in recent years, but still faces a significant challenge in providing additional lane capacity to meet growing travel demand in the years to come. Travel on Arkansas' Interstate highways is expected to increase by 40 percent by the year 2026. Arkansas needs to spend \$4.4 billion over the next 20 years to maintain its Interstate highways and bridges in good condition, to widen urban and rural Interstate sections to relieve growing traffic congestion and to build Arkansas' portions of Interstate 69 and Interstate 49. According to the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department, additional lanes are needed along 185 miles of the existing 655 mile Interstate system in order to relieve growing traffic congestion. Additionally, 45 percent of Arkansas' Interstate highways will need significant reconstruction by the year 2026 to maintain smooth pavement surfaces.

Additional findings of the TRIP report:

- Travel on Arkansas' Interstate highways is more than twice as safe as travel on all other roadways. The fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles of travel on Arkansas' Interstate system in 2004 was 1.33, while it was 2.85 on non-Interstate routes in Arkansas.
- Arkansas' Interstate system, which includes two (2) percent of all roadway lane miles in the state, carries 26 percent of all vehicle travel in the state.
- One percent of Arkansas' Interstate bridges are rated structurally deficient and nine percent are rated functionally obsolete. Five percent of Arkansas' Interstate pavements are in poor condition and an additional nine percent are in mediocre condition. Fourteen percent are in fair condition and the remaining 72 percent are rated in good condition.
- Since funding of the Interstate system was approved in 1956, vehicle miles of travel in Arkansas has increased by 1,128 percent, the number of vehicles in Arkansas has increased by 746 percent and the state's population has jumped by 326 percent.