

Report: Underfunded Roads Costing Maryland Drivers \$7B a Year

New revenues needed to move projects and economy forward, transportation advocates say

By [Sean Sedam](#)

Maryland's deteriorating roads are hitting drivers where it hurts—the wallet—and failure to improve transportation funding could harm the state's economic health, according to a report released Tuesday by a national transportation research organization.

Wear and tear on vehicles, time and fuel spent idling in traffic and costs related to crashes due to insufficient safety features on roadways cost Maryland drivers about \$7 billion a year, or an average of \$2,296 per driver in the Washington metropolitan area, said [the report by TRIP, a Washington, DC-based nonprofit](#).

"When your surface transportation system is not adequate it's going to cost you time and money and can have a significant impact on your safety," said Frank Moretti, TRIP's policy and research director.

It can also hinder economic growth, said former Montgomery County Executive Douglas M. Duncan, who is chairman of the Suburban Maryland Transportation Alliance.

"You need a strong foundation to have a strong house," Duncan said. "We've got very good schools, which is great. But looking at Montgomery County in particular, our future depends on good transportation."

The report calls for a number of projects that are needed but not currently funded including: Interstate 95/495 interchange improvements, [a new bridge on Watkins Mill Road over Interstate 270](#), widening the American Legion Bridge and [the Purple Line](#)

Duncan adds another project: [The Corridor Cities Transitway](#), a 14-mile light rail or bus rapid transit line between the Shady Grove Metro station and the COMSAT site near Clarksburg, which supporters say is critical to development of the so-called [Science City](#) in Shady Grove.

"It's great that we've got places to put the technological growth that we want," Duncan said. "But if we don't have transportation infrastructure in place, then what good is it?"

Among the report's findings:

- 44 percent of the state's roads were in need of repair, according to a 2008 survey.
- A quarter of the state's bridges were found to be structurally deficient or functionally obsolete in 2010.
- 55 percent of the state's urban highways were congested during peak travel times in 2010.
- The traffic fatality rate on Maryland's non-interstate rural roads in 2008 was nearly two-and-a-half-times higher than the rate on all other state roads.

The report comes as Congress has been unable to pass a long-term transportation program and the Maryland General Assembly is debating a fiscal 2012 budget plan by Gov. Martin O'Malley that takes \$100 million from the state's Transportation Trust Fund to help bridge a \$1.4 billion state budget gap, [according to The Gazette](#).

"Maryland's deficient transportation system is hitting the state's drivers in the wallet at a time when many can ill afford it," Will Wilkins, TRIP's executive director said in a statement. "It is much more cost effective to invest in building a sound transportation system than to pass along the cost of a deteriorated system to the state's motorists."

Convincing lawmakers to restore the state's contribution of highway user revenues to municipalities is one of the Maryland Municipal League's top priorities for the 2011 General Assembly. The revenues, which are used largely for road maintenance and small improvement projects, have been cut from \$39.6 million in fiscal 2009 to \$6.8 million in fiscal 2010, to \$1.6 million in fiscal 2011, according to MML.

"What you're seeing is just the normal maintenance of city, county roads is really falling," Duncan said. "They have no money now because the state is taking that funding."

Counties and municipalities are using what money they have for road maintenance. But at some point "you have to replace rather than repair—so your costs escalate rather dramatically," Duncan said.



Now is the time for the state to fund transportation projects, Moretti said. "In the current economy projects can be done a lot more cheaply than they will be in two, three, four years down the road," he said.

But first the state must find new revenue, Duncan said.

One option again being debated in Annapolis is an increase to the state's gasoline tax of 23.5 cents per gallon.

Sen. Robert J. Garagiola (D-Dist. 15) of Germantown said on Tuesday that he plans to propose a bill to increase the gas tax by 8 to 12 cents per gallon, [the Capital News Service reported](#).

Garagiola said that the bill would also call for a voter referendum in November 2012 on a constitutional amendment that would bar the state from tapping into the Transportation Trust Fund to cover budget shortfalls.

That's important, Duncan said.

"Nobody will vote for a gas tax increase because they're not sure the money will go toward transportation," he said. "So they have to make sure the gas tax increase goes to transportation and not to other things."

In the meantime, Duncan said he looks at Northern Virginia to see an example of a state that is making transportation funding a priority.

"What they're doing there with [the Silver Line](#), with the Beltway work, they are clearly putting the infrastructure in place to help their future economy," he said.