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## State's roads congested, deteriorating Study calls for more transportation funding

By SHANTEE WOODARDS, Staff Writer

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The state's deteriorating roads and bridges are costing Maryland drivers in car repairs and medical bills, according to a new report.

Researchers found that nearly 30 percent of the state's roads are rated in poor condition, nearly 20 percent of bridges are functionally obsolete and that more than half of the state's urban highways are congested during peak travel times.

The report, "Future Mobility in Maryland: Meeting the State's Needs for Safe and Efficient Mobility," was released this week by The Road Information Program, or TRIP, a national transportation research group in Washington, D.C.

Representatives from the Maryland Chamber of Commerce, AAA Mid-Atlantic and the Maryland Transportation Builders and Materials Association used the document's release on Tuesday as a way to call for an increase in transportation funding.

State Sen. Robert Garagiola, D-Montgomery, said he plans to introduce legislation that would provide about \$400 million annually to the state's transportation trust fund through an increase in the gas tax and vehicle registration fees. The trust fund is supposed to support the Maryland Department of Transportation's operations and projects.

"Maryland's roads and bridges are deteriorating at a rate faster than the state can afford to repair them," said Carolyn Bonifas, the study's author and TRIP's associate director of research and communications. These statistics "definitely are not a sign of failure ... The agencies are doing a tremendous job (but) they are not able to keep up with these roads because they are so strapped for financial support."

The state Department of Transportation, the State Highway Administration and the Federal Highway Administration are among the agencies that provided the data used for the report.

According to the report, state roads have inadequate capacity to meet travel demands or have poor pavement conditions. Numerous projects are needed - including the widening of portions of Interstates 70 and 695 - but cannot move forward without additional funding, the report stated.

The lack of funding has been an ongoing issue for the State Highway Administration, so the report told it nothing new, spokesman David Buck said. During the past fiscal year, the agency spent \$22.7 million on road projects in Anne Arundel County. That total included resurfacing projects, the widening of Baltimore Washington Parkway and bridge

rehabilitation efforts. The total spent in the county can fluctuate, depending on the scope of the work and there have been no major projects in the county in recent years.

"This group is basically petitioning for additional highway funding, and that's always a good thing," Buck said. "Because of what we're dealing with - it's (now) the winter and ... it'll be 100 degrees this summer - our roads take a massive amount of wear and tear. There are ice storms and snowstorms and the traffic doesn't stop."

Garagiola said he wants to set aside money for the transportation fund that will not be diverted. He said the fund has lost \$300 million because less revenue is coming in from car titling and other sources.

"The problem is, we can't afford to wait any longer," Garagiola said. "If we wait another year, the hole will deepen. We need to get revenue back into the transportation trust fund."

The Maryland Chamber of Commerce has supported raising the gas tax for eight years.

"We have to be able to move our products, provide services and move our employees ... in a safe way," said Kathleen T. Snyder, president and chief executive officer.