

Bad roads cost Md. drivers \$2,200 per year

BY MARYLANDREPORTER.COM
MEGGAN POINSKI



The congestion and poor condition of Maryland's roads cost drivers an average of more than \$2,200 annually in added maintenance, gasoline and safety costs, according to a new report from a national nonprofit transportation research group.

The report from the TRIP organization says the average driver in the Baltimore area ends up paying \$2,226 each year because of road conditions and traffic. D.C.-area drivers end up paying an average of \$2,296 each year. This adds up to \$7 billion in costs to motorists statewide, the report estimates.

"The bottom line is that insufficient roads are costing more drivers thousands of dollars a year at a time they cannot afford it," said Carolyn Bonifas, the organization's associate director of research and communications, and author of the report.

These costs are calculated by using TRIP's own research, the Highway Development and Management Model — an international standard to determine impact of road conditions on vehicle operating costs — and AAA's average vehicle operating costs, the report states. Bonifas said that the additional costs for operating

vehicles in Maryland were among the highest she has seen.

Maryland Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Kathleen Snyder juxtaposed these findings with a recent report from the Texas Transportation Institute that ranked Baltimore's congestion as the nation's fifth worst, and the D.C. area's as the worst.

"The numbers TRIP has presented today are astounding," Snyder said. "For Marylanders to be in the top five in terms of congestion is bad, but now we have a dollar value on that."

AAA Mid-Atlantic Managing Director for Public Affairs Lon Anderson said that the report documents what everyone already knows: Maryland's transportation infrastructure is crumbling, and something needs to happen to stop that. Raw numbers and costs also don't tell the full impact on commuters who spend 50 to 60 more hours behind their steering wheels each year than is necessary, Anderson said.

"How can you look at these numbers and not do anything?" Anderson asked.

Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Garagiola, a Montgomery County Democrat, is poised to offer legislation that will significantly add money to the state's transportation trust fund. The fund gets money from gasoline taxes, vehicle sales taxes and vehicle registration fees and this money has been down \$300 million each year of the recession, Garagiola said. The trust fund has been raided each year to make up for shortfalls in other areas.

In Gov. Martin O'Malley's 2012 budget proposal, \$100 million would be taken from the transportation trust fund to do other things — \$60 million would go in the general fund, and \$40 million would go into the rainy day fund.

Garagiola said that the lack of action to improve road conditions have put Maryland into a hole, which can only get deeper if the state continues to ignore it.

According to TRIP's study, which also looked at the overall condition of Maryland's roads and bridges, Bonifas said that the state's roads are deteriorating at a much faster rate than the state can afford to repair them.

Garagiola, Anderson and Snyder all support raising more money for the transportation trust fund. They all advocated an amendment to the state constitution that would ensure that all money placed in the transportation trust fund could only be used for transportation.

Garagiola said it is very important to protect money in the transportation trust fund — especially since raising more funds would come through doing things that are rather unpopular with constituents, like increasing gas taxes.

"I want to be able to look them in the eye and say the money will be used for transportation," he said.