

For immediate release

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MISSISSIPPI ROAD AND BRIDGE CONDITIONS THREATENED BY \$6 BILLION TRANSPORTATION FUNDING BACKLOG; BOOST IN TRANSPORTATION FUNDING NEEDED TO SUPPORT STATE'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY, IMPROVE ROAD AND BRIDGE CONDITIONS AND BOOST TRAFFIC SAFETY

EDS.: THE REPORT INCLUDES A LIST OF MISSISSIPPI BRIDGES MOST IN NEED OF REPAIR AND NEEDED PROJECTS THAT CAN NOT BE COMPLETED WITHOUT ADDITIONAL TRANSPORTATION FUNDING.

Jackson, Mississippi – At a time when more than one-fifth of Mississippi's major roads are deteriorated, one quarter of the state's bridges are in need of repair and traffic congestion is on the rise, Mississippi faces a \$6 billion transportation funding shortfall over the next ten years. Unless the state is able to close the funding gap, it will be unable to complete numerous projects that would improve road and bridge conditions and safety, or widen key roadways to support long-term economic growth in the state. This is according to a new report released today by TRIP, a Washington, DC based national transportation research organization.

According to the TRIP report, "*Future Mobility in Mississippi: Meeting the State's Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility*," Mississippi will need \$12.5 billion in transportation funding from 2010 to 2019 to significantly improve road and bridge conditions, relieve traffic congestion, enhance economic development opportunities and make needed roadway safety improvements. However, during that time, only \$6.5 billion will be available for transportation improvements under current funding. The Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) has identified numerous needed transportation projects throughout the state that currently lack adequate funding to proceed. These projects include expanding MS 15 from two to four lanes from I-20 to the Tennessee state line, construction of Hattiesburg Beltway and Jackson Beltway, construction of four-lane MS 601 from I-10 to Wiggins, and construction of four-lane I-69/269 from the Arkansas state line to the Tennessee state line. A full list of needed projects that would require a significant boost in federal and state funding to proceed is included in the report.

"As we face today's transportation challenges, we have to come up with innovative ways to rebuild Mississippi's infrastructure," said Senate Highway and Transportation Committee Chairman Tom King-Petal-R. "It is an investment that will not only restore the Nation's and Mississippi's infrastructure, but stimulate the economy and create jobs."

"The Mississippi Legislature continually strives to provide adequate funding to our Department of Transportation even in these challenging times," said House Transportation Committee Chairman Warner McBride-Batesville-D. "Our transportation system must continue to provide public safety and economic viability."

The TRIP report finds that a total of 22 percent of major roads in the state were in poor or very poor condition in 2008. Roads in need of repair cost each Mississippi motorist an average of \$394 annually in extra vehicle operating costs – \$774 million statewide - including accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs and increased fuel consumption and tire wear.

In addition to deteriorated road conditions, Mississippi has the eighth highest percentage of bridges in the nation that are structurally deficient. In 2009, 17 percent of the state's bridges were structurally deficient and an additional eight percent were functionally obsolete.

Vehicle travel and population have increased in the state without a corresponding increase in lane miles, leading to 28 percent of Mississippi's urban highways being congested. From 1990 to 2008, vehicle travel in the state increased at a rate 18 times faster than new capacity was added to the highway system. The TRIP report contains a list of the 30 most congested sections of roadway in the state.

Despite a significant drop in traffic fatalities from 2005 to 2008, Mississippi has the sixth highest traffic fatality rate in the nation, with nearly 900 people annually losing their lives on the state's roads from 2004 to 2008. Mississippi's traffic fatality rate of 1.79 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel in 2008 is the sixth highest rate in the nation, 43 percent higher than the national average of 1.25. Traffic fatalities in Mississippi have dropped significantly from 2005 to 2008 from 931 to 783 and the rate of traffic fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel dropped from 2.32 to 1.79, the first time the state's traffic fatality rate has ever been below 2.00. Mississippi's Strategic Highway Safety Plan calls for reducing traffic fatalities in the state to less than 700 by 2011.

The federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided approximately \$350 million in stimulus funding for highway and bridge improvements in Mississippi. This funding has created jobs and served as an important down payment on needed road, highway and bridge improvements but is not sufficient to allow the state to proceed with numerous projects needed to modernize its surface transportation system. The current long-term federal surface transportation legislation, which expires on February 28, 2010, remains a critical source of funding for road and bridge repairs and transit improvements in Mississippi. With the current federal transportation program set to expire this month, Congress has an opportunity to approve a new federal surface transportation program that could include a significant boost in funding for highway and transit improvements in Mississippi.

“Unless Mississippi is able to close its \$6 billion transportation funding gap, many additional needed projects will remain stranded on the drawing board because of insufficient funding,” said Will Wilkins, executive director of TRIP. “It is critical that Mississippi adequately fund its transportation system. Congress must move forward on an immediate and long-term extension of the federal transportation program, as well as additional recovery funding to support further job creation. Thousands of jobs and the state's economy are riding on it.”