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NEVADA HAS BENEFITTED FROM RECENT PROJECTS TO IMPROVE THE STATE'S SURFACE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM, BUT SIGNIFICANT DEFICIENCIES REMAIN; BOOST IN TRANSPORTATION FUNDING NEEDED TO SUPPORT STATE'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY, PROVIDE CONGESTION RELIEF AND IMPROVE TRAFFIC SAFETY

EDS.: THE REPORT INCLUDES A LIST OF NEEDED PROJECTS THAT REMAIN UNFUNDED, INCLUDING PROJECTS TO ADD CAPACITY TO CONGESTED ROADWAYS AND IMPROVE SAFETY

Reno, Nevada -- Nevada's urban roads and highways experience significant congestion, which is likely to worsen as the state's economy recovers. An increased investment in transportation improvements could relieve traffic congestion and support long-term economic growth in Nevada. In the past decade, the state has used a combination of federal and state funding to improve its surface transportation network, but many sorely needed transportation projects still remain unfunded, according to a new report released today by TRIP, a Washington, DC based national transportation organization.

The report, "Future Mobility in Nevada: Meeting the State's Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility," finds that 59 percent of the state's major urban roadways are considered congested during peak travel times and that congestion levels in the Las Vegas and Reno areas are expected to increase significantly in the future, unless significant improvements in the region's transportation systems are completed. The report also found that the state's traffic fatality rate is higher than the national average, 12 percent of the state's bridges are either structurally deficient or functionally obsolete, and 13 percent of the state's major roads are rated in either poor or mediocre condition.

Because of these deficiencies, the average Las Vegas area motorist loses \$1,481 each year in the form of extra vehicle operating costs due to poor road conditions, lost time and fuel caused by traffic congestion, and the cost of traffic crashes. Reno area drivers are estimated to lose \$972 annually in similar costs. Nevada roadways that lack desirable safety features, have inadequate capacity to meet travel demands or have poor pavement conditions were found to cost the state's drivers a total of \$1.8 billion each year.

"The TRIP report quantifies the very real costs to drivers when funding for highways doesn't keep up with the needs," said State Senator Bill Raggio. "Our highway budget has been going down while demands on the system have been steadily increasing."

According to the TRIP report, without a significant boost in funding, numerous needed transportation projects will not proceed, including expanding portions of I-580 in Reno to six lanes, widening portions of US-395 in Carson City to six lanes and expanding portions of I-515/US-95 and I-15 in Las Vegas to ten lanes. The TRIP report contains lists of needed roadway repair projects, highway expansion projects and transit improvements in the Las Vegas and Reno areas as well as statewide that can not move forward without additional transportation funding.

Despite the current economic downturn Nevada remains the fastest-growing state in the nation, with its population and level of vehicle travel more than doubling since 1990. The report projects that vehicle travel in Nevada will increase by another 70 percent by 2030, further congesting the state's highways unless significant improvements are made to the state's roadways and transit systems.

The federal surface transportation program, which expires on October 31, 2009, remains a critical source of funding for road and bridge repairs and transit improvements in Nevada. According to the report, from 1998 to 2008, Nevada received \$2.77 billion in federal funding for road, highway and bridge improvements, and \$520 million for public transit, a total of \$3.3 billion.

This year's federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provides approximately \$201 million in stimulus funding for highway and bridge improvements and \$49 million for public transit improvements in Nevada. This funding, however, serves only as a down payment on needed road, highway, bridge and transit improvements and is not sufficient to allow the state to proceed with numerous projects needed to modernize its surface transportation system.

With the current federal transportation program set to expire, 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 Nevada.

"Nevada has benefited tremendously from the federal surface transportation program," said Will Wilkins, executive director of TRIP. "While the state has put this combination of federal and state funds to good use in the past, in the coming years, many additional needed projects will remain stranded on the drawing board because of insufficient funding. It is critical that the state adequately fund its transportation system and that Congress produces a timely and adequately funded federal surface transportation program this year. Thousands of jobs and the state's economy are riding on it."