

Portland Press Herald

Study finds transportation problems cost Maine motorists over \$1 billion annually

Higher operating costs, collisions and delays cost Portland-area drivers an average of almost \$1,400 a year each, according to a national transportation nonprofit.

BY [PETER MCGUIRE](#) | STAFF WRITER | 2.05.2021 | [CLICK HERE TO VIEW ONLINE.](#)

Maine's battered and congested road system costs motorists across the state a total of \$1.3 billion annually in maintenance, repair and wasted time and fuel, according to a new analysis from a national advocacy group.

Higher operating costs, traffic collisions and delays cost Portland-area drivers an average of nearly \$1,400 a year each, according to a report issued this week by TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit based in Washington, D.C.

Maintenance and repair to Maine's roads and bridges are chronically underfunded, and the state Department of Transportation estimates unmet highway funding is at least \$232 million a year.

"These conditions are only going to get worse, increasing the additional costs to motorists, if greater investment is not made available at federal, state and local levels of government," said TRIP Executive Director Dave Kearby in a news release. "Without adequate funding, Maine's transportation system will become increasingly deteriorated and congested, hampering economic growth, safety and quality of life."

Almost half the roads in Greater Portland are in poor or mediocre condition, the research group reported. About 27 bridges, 8 percent of them in the Portland region, are rated structurally deficient, it added.

Bad roads and bridges cost each Portland-area motorist an average of about \$531 a year in extra vehicle operating costs and \$293 a year in safety-related costs, TRIP reported.

Congestion is worse in and around Portland than anywhere else in the state, researchers found. More than three-quarters of the 20 most congested traffic corridors in the state are in Greater Portland, including parts of Interstate 295, Congress Street, Route 302 and roads around Gorham. Traffic congestion costs Portland-area drivers an average of \$568 and 28 hours a year, according to a 2019 report from the Texas Transportation Institute.

Statewide, 23 percent of Maine's major roads are in poor condition, and 21 percent are in mediocre condition, according to TRIP's report.

Traffic congestion has decreased in Maine during the coronavirus pandemic, falling by almost half during a statewide lockdown last April. Many motorists have returned to the roads since then, but in November, vehicle travel remained 12 percent below the same period a year earlier, according to TRIP researchers.

Declining traffic and depressed fuel tax revenue has put Maine's underfunded highway budget in a tougher position. A three-year road and bridge work plan estimates revenues will be down \$30 million in the fiscal year ending in June. The department expects lawmakers to send a \$150 million transportation bond to voters this year to pay for projects.

Maine Transportation Commissioner Bruce Van Note said in a statement that once the state is through the coronavirus pandemic and its economic fallout, it will have to resolve the structural revenue problems to maintain and make targeted improvements to the state's transportation system.

"Investing in transportation is key to moving Maine forward," Van Note said.