

REPORT: LACK OF FUNDING, PREPARATION FOR FUTURE THREATEN ROADS

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STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

BOSTON, JUNE 23, 2008....Even if Massachusetts mustered the political will to close an estimated \$15 billion to \$19 billion transportation funding gap, emerging trends in the use of roads and bridges would still overwhelm the state's aging, deteriorating infrastructure, according to a new report.

With a population expected to increase by 500,000 by 2025 and vehicle travel expected to increase 20 percent in the same timeframe, the state must "develop and maintain a modern highway and transit system that can accommodate future growth in population, economic development and personal and commercial travel," the report concluded.

Already long rush-hour delays will more than double by 2030 if highway capacity remains at its current level, according to the 55-page report released Monday by the Massachusetts Transportation Investment Coalition. Trucking, the report found, will increase 43 percent by 2020.

The report's authors say road improvements would reduce vehicle crashes and bring down related annual costs per resident.

Without new funding, Massachusetts bridges roads and bridges are "deteriorating and likely to worsen," according to the report, compiled by The Road Information Program, a Washington D.C.-based nonprofit. TRIP found that an aging infrastructure is "not a reflection of the effectiveness of state and local transportation agencies, but of a lack of adequate funding."

Unlike last year's report of the Transportation Finance Commission, which first described the oft-repeated \$15 billion to \$19 billion funding shortfall, the TRIP report does not include any revenue-raising recommendations. The report's backers say they eschewed specific proposals in favor of a statewide campaign to raise awareness about existing problems.

"We're seeing the devastating price that can be paid if transportation infrastructure is not invested in, elsewhere in the nation," said Conservation Law Foundation President Phil Warburg at a morning press conference against a backdrop of the structurally deficient North Washington Street Bridge. "We don't want a disaster in Massachusetts. When we look at other states and we look abroad, we see transportation systems that are much better developed than our own that are truly a match for 21st century economic development. Massachusetts deserves that kind of investment."

Warburg and other transportation leaders described Massachusetts as beset by "Big Dig fatigue," and said winning back public support for a major transportation overhaul was a key element of their strategy. They urged Gov. Deval Patrick to emphasize transportation infrastructure repairs and expansion as part of his economic development agenda. Warburg declined to say whether an 11.5-cent gas tax hike recommended by the Transportation Finance Commission would be wise but said the Legislature and the governor would have to consider a variety of options.

The new effort, called the Campaign for Our Transportation Future, will be led by the heads of many of the state's prominent transportation, environmental and public policy groups, including AAA Southern New England, Associated Industries of Massachusetts, MassPIRG, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and the AFL-CIO. Little explanation was provided for the timing of the announcement or whether there was a timeframe for future proposals or specific recommendations.

Other findings in the report include:

- Massachusetts motorists pay \$788 million a year -- \$156 each -- more than they would if roads were in good repair, with most of the extra costs going to vehicle depreciation, fuel consumption, repair costs and tire wear;
- More than half of state and local bridges of 20 feet or longer are structurally deficient, with 379 of the state's 1,084 interstate bridges on the verge of a structurally deficient label;
- More than one in five miles of MBTA track are in need of repair; businesses are making strategic decisions to locate in areas with more fluid transportation systems;
- 38 percent of MBTA buses and 82 percent rapid transit rail cars are in "poor or marginal condition;"
- And state roads carry 66 percent more traffic than the national average, behind only New Jersey, Maryland, Connecticut and Hawaii.

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