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YOUR COMMUTE

Bad roads cost Texas drivers \$336 a year in repairs

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BY GORDON DICKSON

gdickson@star-telegram.com

Potholes, crumbling pavement and other byproducts of poorly maintained roads are costing [Texas](#) car owners an average of \$336 a year in unnecessary repairs, according to a report released Thursday.

"As road conditions deteriorate, drivers incur greater and greater costs every time they get behind the wheel," says the report, titled *Road Work Ahead* by the Texas Public Interest Research Group.

"As the amount of road decay, potholes, bumps, clogged drainage systems, and damaged bridges increases, so too do the number of accidents, the amount of money spent on car maintenance and the number of hours consumed by driving."

The report by the organization, a nonprofit consumer group, concludes that elected officials and state policymakers have their priorities mixed up. Instead of spending more of their highway dollars keeping existing roads and bridges in good working order, they continue to focus on building new roads.

"It's like adding a guest room on your home when the roof is leaking," advocate Melissa Cubria said.

Middle of the road

Despite the grim tone of the report, Texas ranked in the middle among states -- 24th -- in terms of the cost of car repairs. About 7 percent of Texas roads are in poor or mediocre condition, and Texans' average \$336 a year car repair bill is nearly identical to the national average of \$335, the report states.

The worst states included New Jersey, where car owners paid an average \$596 in additional car repairs because of road conditions, and California, where they paid \$590.

San Antonio, where the average car repair was \$590, was the only Texas metro area among the nation's worst 20.

The Texas Department of Transportation's own data shows that in 2009 the agency spent about half its budget on new roads, and half on maintenance of existing roads -- \$3.4 billion versus \$3 billion, respectively.

Political pressure

Transportation officials are under pressure from state lawmakers to keep building roads to try to meet the needs of a population that continues to grow despite the economic downturn. Elected leaders oppose diverting all highway funds to maintenance.

"The Legislature said, you've got to find a supportable balance" of new road work and maintenance, said Steven Polunsky, staff director of the state's Senate Transportation and [Homeland Security Committee](#)

Meanwhile, Texas' pavement scores continue to get worse. The state regularly grades the quality of its road surfaces on a scale of 1 to 100, and scores have steadily dropped during the past four years. In 2005, 87.3 percent of roadways were in good or better condition, but today the rating has dropped to 85.9 percent.

State officials hope the percentage of highways in good or better condition will jump to 87.2 percent during the coming year because of a one-time infusion of federal stimulus funding for road maintenance.

And the funding problem promises to get worse. Gas tax revenue, the primary source of highway funding, is on the decline as motorists cut back their driving habits and pick more fuel-efficient cars.

Unless new revenue sources are found, Texas will be out of money to build new roads by 2012, Transportation Department spokesman Christopher Lippincott said.

Then the state will have little choice, Lippincott said, but to spend its budget on maintenance.

GORDON DICKSON, 817-390-7796

Read more: <http://www.star-telegram.com/2010/05/06/2170996/poorly-maintained-roads-cost-texas.html#ixzz0nHUIUUft>