

Congestion eroding Interstate system's safety and economic benefits

The final push for what became The Dwight D. Eisenhower National System of Interstate and Defense Highways - "the most ambitious public works project built since the Roman Empire" - began 50 years ago this January as Eisenhower, a noted highway proponent, was inaugurated as president.

A new report released by a national transportation research group finds that America's Interstate highways - the most critical link in our surface transportation system - are increasingly congested because new travel is rapidly outpacing existing capacity and eroding the system's safety and economic benefits.

"The Interstate Highway System: Saving Lives, Time and Money, but Increasing Congestion Threatens Ben-

efits," examines the current condition and future challenges of today's Interstate system, 50 years to the month when President Eisenhower was inaugurated and the funding and scope of the system were being debated.

"The same transportation challenges

Eisenhower's Post WWII legacy overwhelmed by today's traffic

that the President and Congress faced a half century ago - defense (and homeland security), economic productivity, traffic congestion and safety - exist today, and just as President Eisenhower promoted the creation of the Interstates to address those challenges, now is the time for our national lawmakers to for-

mulate a bold new transportation vision for the 21st Century," said William M. Wilkins, Executive Director of The Road Information Program (TRIP).

"Congress and the Administration will have the opportunity this year to develop and fund a modern transportation system when Congress takes up the reauthorization of federal surface transportation legislation," Wilkins said. "Given the outstanding transportation needs that exist, increased funding is crucial to any successful plan of action."

While Interstate pavement and bridge conditions have improved slightly over the past few years, primarily due to increased funding in recent federal surface transportation legislation, investment levels have been inadequate to deal with mounting traffic congestion.

A recent study by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) found that the current \$65 billion annual level of highway investment will have to increase by 42 percent, to \$92 billion annually, just to maintain roads and bridges in their current physical condition, and to stop traffic congestion from getting worse.

The AASHTO report also found that it would take nearly doubling current highway investments, to \$125 billion annually, to improve significantly overall conditions of the nation's roads

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Missouri's interstate pavement deteriorates from 1996

	1996	2001
Percent of interstates in good condition	44%	29%
Percent of interstates in fair condition	38%	33%
Percent of interstates in mediocre condition	16%	33%
Percent of interstates in poor condition	2%	6%
No. of interstate miles in good condition	515	339
No. of interstate miles in fair condition	452	384
No. of interstate miles in mediocre condition	193	391
No. of interstate miles in poor condition	18	66
Total number of interstate miles	1178	1180



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and bridges, including improvements in safety and a reduction in traffic congestion.

Travel on the Interstate system increased by 37 percent from 1991 to 2001, while additional lane mileage increased by five percent, meaning that vehicle travel grew at a rate seven times higher than additional capacity was added over the last decade, according to the TRIP study.

This trend has contributed to increasing levels of traffic congestion on our Interstate system, with two out of five urban Interstate miles considered congested because they carry traffic at volumes that result in significant delays. The proportion of urban Interstate miles that are considered congested increased from 33 to 41 percent from 1996 to 2001.

"As Interstates become more crowded, motorists and truckers are starting to drive on other routes to avoid the congestion," Wilkins said. "Unfortunately, once you leave the Interstate system your chance of being killed in a traffic accident doubles."

Interstate highways are the safest roadways in the country. The fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles of travel on the Interstate system is .81, while it is 1.74 on non-Interstate routes. The Interstate system saved approximately 6,235 lives in 2001, based on an estimate of the number of traffic fatalities that would have occurred if there had been no Interstates.

"We know why the Interstates are safer, we need to apply that know-how to improving other roads so that they are safer," Wilkins said. "It's unacceptable for anyone to lose his or her life in a traffic accident when it could have been prevented by making a safety improvement on a road or highway."

The features that make Interstates so safe include: a separation from other roads and rail lines, a minimum of four-lanes, gentler curves and often paved shoulders, median barriers and rumble strips to warn drivers if they are leaving the roadway.

Congress has several options available for funding a significant boost in surface transportation funding to help tackle traffic congestion and maintain the benefits provided by our Interstates. These options include:

▲ Increasing the federal 18.4 cents-per-gallon motor fuel tax.

▲ Indexing the federal motor fuel tax to inflation, so that it increases at the rate of inflation.

▲ Reimbursing the Federal Highway Trust Fund, for the revenue lost because of the 5.4 cents-per-gallon exemption from federal motor fuel tax for gasohol.

▲ Drawing down the reserve balance in the federal Highway Trust Fund.

▲ Capturing the interest on the federal Highway Trust Fund, which currently accrues to the general fund.



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Did you know?

Our eyes are always the same size from birth, but our nose and ears never stop growing.

Shakespeare invented the words "assassination" and "bump".

Stewardesses is the longest word typed with only the left hand, lollipop with your right.

The cruise liner, QE2, moves only six inches for each gallon of diesel that it burns.

The name of all the continents end with the same letter that they start with.