

## **Bad Roads Taking Their Toll**

### **Concerns raised over funding available for trains, buses**

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Connecticut Post Online

10/04/06

Bad roads in the Bridgeport area are costing drivers hundreds of dollars in repairs, according to a recent report, but Connecticut experts disagree over whether this means the state needs to invest more in its roadways. Washington, D.C.-based TRIP, a research group supported by the insurance, engineering and construction industries, said Monday that 18 percent of the major roads in the area are in poor condition, adding about \$325 to annual motor vehicle repair costs.

The report looked at major thoroughfares — such as Fairfield Avenue in Bridgeport — interstate highways and state routes, such as Route 8. It relied on reports from the U.S. Department of Transportation, AAA and several studies from universities and other research groups to come up with its figures. Only 11 percent of roads in the New Haven area were rated as poor, but bad pavement there cost motorists \$264 a year in repairs. Nineteen percent of roads in the Hartford area were rated as poor, causing \$349 in damage per year, the report said. The worst roads in America were in California, where more than 60 percent in San Jose, Los Angeles and the San Francisco-Oakland area were rated "poor."

Norman Garrick, associate professor of transportation engineering at the University of Connecticut, said the report is highlighting "a misplaced concern." He said that because roadwork dominates transportation funding in Connecticut and the nation, other parts of the transportation system, such as buses and trains, are in even worse condition.

"We have a tendency to focus on the most obvious problems," Garrick said, citing engineers' preoccupation with relieving traffic jams and other road problems. "But do we do anything about the half-hour wait for a bus or crowded trains?"

He said even Connecticut's recent pledge to buy new rail cars will only "bring it up to normal."

Connecticut plans to spend more than \$1 billion within the next 10 years to buy the cars, expand parking at stations and upgrade repair facilities for the Metro-North Railroad New Haven Line. The railroad was running cars built in the 1970s that were breaking down more often even as ridership rose.

What the state and nation should do is develop integrated transportation systems, Garrick said, to take some of the burden off the highways. The existing formula is to pump money into improving highways and other roads, which encourages more traffic, compounding the problem of maintenance and its costs, he said.

TRIP's report called on federal and state governments to come up with a new plan to maintain only the roads, which carried 38 percent more traffic in 2004 than in 1990. By 2022, according to U.S. DOT estimates cited by TRIP, funding for urban roads would fall \$76 billion short of paying for maintenance costs and \$138 billion short of making needed repairs.

James Wang, executive director of the Greater Bridgeport Regional Planning Agency, said he thinks the TRIP study is probably correct on the condition of the area's roads and the need for more funding.

Connecticut's major problems, Wang said, are on the interstates that carry the majority of truck traffic. Trucks place more wear and tear on the roads, meaning more maintenance must be carried out, he said.

Wang also supports the design of an integrated transportation system but said the highways can't be ignored while the state builds such a system.