

Road evaluation gives Michigan bad marks

By KEN OSBORNE

Lansing-area road conditions received an "F" in a report released Monday by the nonprofit organization The Road Information Program, or TRIP.

The region received a "B" in the traffic congestion portion of the report, a "D-" in bridge conditions and a "C" in safety.

TRIP also released a report on the condition of Michigan's transportation system. The state received a "D" in road condition, a "D" for its bridges, a "C" in congestion and a "C-" in safety.

Poor road conditions can directly impact the businesses that have to deal with them, said Bill Sepic, president of the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce.

"If we are going to be competitive at all and grow new businesses, job creation, revenue or even tourism, then we have to improve our roadways," Sepic said. "This is unacceptable."

The study is based on data collected in 2004, which is the most recent data available.

About 21 percent of major roads in the Lansing region were in poor condition, and another 28 percent were in mediocre condition, according to the report.

Statewide, about 38 percent of major roads had pavement in poor or mediocre condition.

Poor roads are defined as "badly cracked or broken," whereas roads considered in mediocre condition "may show signs of significant wear."

Bridges in the Lansing area are in need of improvement as well. The study found that 15 percent of bridges in the area are rated "structurally deficient." Another 18 percent are considered "functionally obsolete." The report considers bridges 20 feet or longer. There are 244 such bridges in the Lansing area.

These ratings do not show the bridges are in danger of collapsing, said Frank Moretti, the director of policy and research for TRIP. They mean bridges are in need of repair and will not last as long, he said.

Safety is partially based on traffic fatalities. Michigan is below the national average for traffic fatalities, and the area is better than the state's rate, with about 10 traffic fatalities per 100,000 people in the Lansing area and about 12.8 per 100,000 people in Michigan. The national average is 14.5 fatalities per 100,000 people. Road conditions with some deficiency factor in about one-third of traffic deaths yearly, Moretti said.

"State and local governments across the country are finding that if they can systematically invest in the most cost-effective safety strategies in that region, over time there are long-term benefits in saving lives and preventing injuries," Moretti said.

During the last five years, the state has made some strides in bridge repairs. However, road conditions have remained about the same and traffic congestion has increased, Moretti said.

In addition, TRIP believes congestion will continue to increase throughout the state as vehicle travel increases.

Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero was scheduled to attend the conference as well but was unable to attend.

The mayor did however issue a press release on the report.

"The TRIP report confirms what Lansing residents have known for a long time — our roads are in terrible shape, and it will require a major financial commitment to get them back on track," Bernero said in the statement.