

INCHING ALONG ROADS AND HIGHWAYS



PATRICIA BECK/Detroit Free Press

Just one little thing — even if it's on the other side of the road — can add 20 minutes or more to a commute, drivers in metro Detroit say. A new study reports that in 2005, area drivers spent about 54 hours stuck in backups and heavy traffic like this on I-696 on Tuesday.

Hours wasted in traffic

Area ranks 8th nationwide in time drivers lose because of congestion

METRO DETROIT


By MATT HELMS
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Metro Detroit remains among the 10 most congested places for spending time stuck in traffic, with drivers losing an average of 54 hours a year, up three hours from about a decade ago, a new study found.

Nationwide, drivers lose an average of 38 hours a year — about 4.2 billion hours to-

tal — inching along clogged roads and freeways, according to the Urban Mobility Report released Tuesday by the Texas Transportation Institute at Texas A&M University. The report is based on data from 2005.

The Detroit area ranked eighth nationwide. But the long-term trend is clear: Detroit-area drivers spend more than twice as many hours stuck in backups and congestion than they did in 1982, when the average was

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25 hours.

Steve Crandall of Livonia quickly computed that delays add an hour a week for him and other area commuters.

"My normal commute time is 20 minutes, and when I get into a traffic jam or a construction zone, that commute can go anywhere from an extra five minutes to an extra 20 minutes," said Crandall, 50, who works for

Lost time

Here are the 10 most congested U.S. metro areas, according to the Texas Transportation Institute. Listed are the average number of hours drivers waste in traffic delays per year.

Metro area	2005	1995
1. Los Angeles	72	71
2. Atlanta	60	70
3. San Francisco-Oakland	60	56
4. Washington, D.C.	60	53
5. Dallas-Ft. Worth	58	34
6. San Diego	57	35
7. Houston	56	32
8. Detroit	54	51
9. Orlando	54	54
10. San Jose, Calif.	54	51

Source: Associated Press

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an advertising agency in Farmington Hills and drives about 18 miles to work and back.

Julie Powell, 35, of Harper Woods said she leaves for work most days no later than 7:15 a.m., and it takes about 20 minutes to get to downtown Detroit, where she's a Wayne County assistant prosecutor. The return trip is usually about 30 minutes.

"But if there's one little thing — a car on the side of the road, sometimes something on the other side of the free-way — it slows down the commute considerably," Powell said.

The Detroit area was well behind the nation's worst big city for congestion: Los Angeles, where drivers averaged 72 hours a year going nowhere fast.

Congestion's impact is more than frayed nerves. The report estimates the lost time creates a \$78-billion annual



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Heavy traffic on westbound I-696 slows some drivers down.

drain on the U.S. economy and wastes 2.9 billion gallons of fuel. The report said solutions include adding capacity to roadways, improving public transit, encouraging more carpooling and wider use of computerized intelligent-transportation systems.

"People are spending more money and more time away

from things far more important than merely driving back and forth to work," said Jeffrey Solsby, spokesman for the trade group American Road and Transportation Builders Association, one of the report's sponsors.

Carmine Palombo, director of transportation planning for the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, said the region's road needs far outpace its resources, to the tune of an estimated \$30-billion shortfall through 2030.

"We don't have a lot of options here for people, compared to other cities, in terms of getting around without a car," Palombo said. "We need to provide people in this region with more options."

Palombo said federal funding for road improvements nationwide is expected to drop precipitously in 2009 without a major change in policy.

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