

## Study: Traffic congestion costs state \$3B annually

Baltimore Business Journal - by Scott Dance Staff

Baltimore's 1.2 million commuters each spend about 50 hours annually sitting in traffic, creating an expected cost of \$1 billion per year, according to a study released Tuesday.

Across the state, the costs of traffic congestion -- including wasted fuel, time and economic opportunity -- total \$3.1 billion per year, the study found.

The Greater Baltimore Committee, Greater Washington Board of Trade and Maryland Chamber of Commerce issued the study, done by the Texas A&M University System's Texas Transportation Institute. The report details the weaknesses of the state's transportation infrastructure and the possibilities for its future.

It poses the possibility that the state's transportation spending would increase by \$600 million annually -- a move GBC CEO Donald Fry has pushed as a necessity. Such an investment would cut \$1 billion in costs related to congestion, the study said. With \$400 million worth of transportation investment each year, \$687 million could be saved.

The study explains that the work that would be done through the added investment would create thousands of jobs that would generate hundreds of millions of dollars in economic impact. Increased ease of travel would also make businesses more efficient and waste less time and fuel.

Fry said he thinks it's important for state leaders to note that three of Maryland's most significant business groups are supporting the study and that transportation is a key issue not just for environmental reasons or quality of life improvements, but also for the business climate and economy. He said he expects the study to have weight during transportation funding discussions in the General Assembly's Oct. 29 special session and its regular session in January.

"We think this report is a strong validation of the need for \$600 million in the Transportation Trust Fund," Fry said in an interview. The fund pays for transportation system maintenance and a backlog of new projects -- which have anticipated price tags of \$250 million a year and \$40 billion, respectively, Fry said.

"We certainly think this helps us make the case for the legislature to invest this sum of money," Fry said.

But if the transportation system isn't improved, \$10.8 billion in economic opportunity would be lost over the next 25 years, the study predicts.

Rush-hour traffic has grown 71 percent from 1982 to 2003, but the number of highway and principal artery lane miles has only grown 35 percent, according to the study.