

New report says traffic costs region

Traffic congestion costs the Baltimore-Washington region more than \$3 billion a year, according to a study released yesterday by the Texas Transportation Institute.

The study was commissioned by the **Greater Baltimore Committee**, the Greater Washington Board of Trade and the Maryland Chamber of Commerce. All three influential business groups have been urging state lawmakers to spend more money on transportation infrastructure, arguing that gridlock hurts businesses and degrades quality of life.

Donald C. Fry, president and chief executive officer of the Greater Baltimore Committee, said the report confirms what the business leaders knew: Transportation funding is the state's biggest obstacle to economic growth.

"It brings together all three major business organizations saying, 'There's a business case justifying a significant investment in transportation,'" Fry said. "Not only are there good business reasons to do it, but good economic reasons and good quality-of-life reasons."

Yesterday's findings prompted the three groups to renew their push for more transportation money, calling for the state's Transportation Trust Fund to be increased by at least \$600 million a year. They suggest raising that money with an increase in the state's gasoline tax and say money in the trust fund should not be used for purposes unrelated to transportation.

Gov. Martin O'Malley has been looking at ways to shore up transportation funding. Last month, he discussed tying the gas tax to construction inflation costs, which would generate about \$63 million. But Fry said the state would just be "treading water" under that proposal and would need 10 times that amount to address the backlog of planned projects.

The Baltimore-Washington area consistently ranks as one of the most congested in the nation. The new study estimated that in the Baltimore area, residents spent 60 million hours a year sitting in traffic. For regular commuters, that is about 40 hours a year.

Since 1982, the number of peak-period travelers has increased 71 percent, and daily vehicle miles traveled have increased 135 percent. Meanwhile, the number of lane miles on highways and main streets has gone up by 35 percent.

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