

It's official: L.A. traffic is nation's worst

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Motorists in Los Angeles face the worst rush-hour traffic in the country, spending nearly two workweeks stuck behind the wheel in jams and wasting nearly 60 gallons of gas, according to a study released Tuesday.

Angelenos spend 72 extra hours a year on the road - 12 more than commuters in San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta, which all have the second-highest traffic delays in the nation, according to the report by the Texas Transportation Institute.

The national average is 38 hours of extra delay each year. But the report found traffic congestion around the country has continued to worsen, creating a \$78 billion annual drain on the U.S. economy as motorists consume 2.9 billion gallons of fuel idling in bottlenecks and lose 4.2 billion hours from their lives.

"There is no magic technology or solution on the horizon because there is no single cause of congestion," said Tim Lomax, a researcher at the institute and co-author of the report, which is based on data from 2005.

"Congestion is a far more complex problem than is apparent at first glance."

To most Los Angeles residents, Tuesday's announcement comes as no surprise. And some drivers are literally sick of traffic.

"I come home tired, stressed out and anxious," Rosa Morales said of her commute home from Sherman Oaks to West Hills for a part-time baby-sitting job.

And some Angelenos, such as Kelly Longstreet, say it's time to give up California's sunny skies for greener pastures and say goodbye to gridlock for good.

Longstreet is packing up for Indiana, where commuters in Indianapolis spend an additional 43 hours a year in traffic, according to the study.

"One of the things I was looking for was less traffic," the medical claims officer said about her decision to move. "I want to enjoy a better quality of life."

Caltrans Director Will Kempton said the Texas study reflects California's dire need to update its transit system.

"With the passage of Proposition 1B last fall, the voters spoke loud and clear that we need to bring California's transportation system up to date," Kempton said in a written statement.

The \$19.9 billion bond provides money for highway improvement projects. Of the money allocated so far, Los Angeles is getting \$730 million for a \$950 million, 10-mile northbound car-pool lane on the San Diego Freeway through the Sepulveda Pass.

In addition, \$387 million will help stretch Interstate 5 from six to 10 lanes at the Orange County border and \$315 million more was just awarded to the Exposition Line rail project under construction from downtown to Culver City.

But it will take far more work to get the region moving - from tackling port traffic to synchronizing traffic signals, said Roger Snoble, Metro CEO.

"These are all things we should keep on doing, and if we had the money, we could do them faster," Snoble said. "We're still going to be as aggressive as we can and stretch our dollars as far as we can."

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