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S. Fla. drivers spend 50 hours a year stuck in traffic

Delays cost you time and money

By Michael Turnbull and Andrew Tran | South Florida Sun-Sentinel
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South Florida drivers spend on average 50 hours a year stuck in traffic, according to a new national study released today.

And those traffic jams aren't just annoying, they're costing money.

Congestion cost drivers in Broward, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties about \$2.7 billion in 2005, or about \$903 per person, up from \$1.78 billion or \$688 per person in 2000.

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The costs shown in the Texas Transportation Institute's study reflect fuel costs, vehicle wear and the value of each motorist's time spent fighting traffic on or off the job. The institute is part of Texas A&M University.

Drivers in South Florida spent slightly more time stuck in traffic in 2005 than they did in the previous year, when they sat idle for 49 hours. The region ranked 11th in the number of hours of delay per driver. But it comes out 5th worst in the total number of hours of delay experienced by all drivers - 150 million.

The study summed it up this way: "Too many people, too many trips over too short of a time period on a system that is too small."

It could be worse. Motorists would have spent an additional four hours stuck in traffic in 2005 if it had not been for the savings associated with mass transit, I-95's high occupancy vehicle lanes and efforts to remove crashes quickly.

Robert Sey, 40, an insurance salesman from Tamarac, senses that traffic congestion has gotten worse over the 10 years he has lived in South Florida. "Everywhere you go, it just takes longer to get there," he said. "There's always more construction projects going on that seems to take forever to get it



completed."

Gabe Retacco, 33, of Fort Lauderdale, said he thinks the traffic problem is getting worse. "Overall, it's not so bad.... They're widening all the lanes, they're trying to fix it, but it just takes them so long."

Just to maintain the same level of congestion with South Florida's growth, authors say the region would have to build 330 lane miles - the equivalent of a road 165 miles long - and add 111,000 daily transit or carpool riders each day.

Seeing as that's unlikely, co-author and research scientist David Schrank said regions need a balanced approach to hold the line on congestion.

Options include coordinating traffic signals, adding lanes and changing through flexible work schedules to more controversial solutions such as diverting traffic onto expressways at rush hour or giving drivers the option of a transit guarantee a quicker commute.

This fall, the state begins restriping I-95 between Miami and Fort Lauderdale to accommodate two toll express lanes in each direction, the first of what is planned as a network of toll lanes on I-95, I-75 and I-595. Ramps signals on I-95 between Ives Dairy Road and Northwest 62nd Street, which were installed last year, will be activated once the I-95 toll lanes open to traffic.

"Congestion relief is not just a matter of highway and transit agencies but also of businesses, shippers, manufacturers and employers, as well as commuters, shoppers and travelers."

There were some bright spots in the study.

In the 23 years covered by the report from 1982 to 2005, South Florida commuters went from spending 21 million hours a year in traffic to 150 million hours. Although a large increase, it's actually less than the average of 13 other large urban areas in the study.

South Florida also isn't the worst in Florida in every category. Orlando drivers wasted on average 54 hours stuck in traffic. Orlando ranked 8th among all cities in average delays per traveler. South Florida ranked 11th (50 hours) and Tampa Bay was 20th (45 hours).

The full report can be viewed at <http://mobility.tamu.edu>.

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