

Pew report says Alabama not keeping data needed for best decisions on transportation

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Alabama is one of 19 states "trailing behind" when it comes to keeping data needed to make the best transportation policy and funding decisions, according to a report released Wednesday by the Pew Center on the States and The Rockefeller Foundation.

The report says the state is "leading the way" in improving traffic safety and preserving infrastructure, but has "mixed results" in jobs and commerce, mobility, and access and is "trailing behind" in environmental stewardship and overall performance.

"Studies like this will always find areas for improvement, and all of us at ALDOT take seriously our mission of providing a safe, efficient highway system, creating and sustaining jobs, and protecting our environment," said Alabama Department of Transportation spokesman Tony Harris.

The ratings came through a review of states' "performance, planning and budget documents," the report stated.

Other states the report lists as "trailing behind" are Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Hawaii, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

Alabama, which spent \$1.81 billion on transportation in fiscal year 2010 according to the report, was credited for keeping detailed data on traffic fatalities and injuries and tracking the condition of roads and bridges.

States nationwide spent an estimated total of \$131 billion on transportation in fiscal year 2010, but the report argues many states, including Alabama, lacked the necessary data to determine what return its transportation investments yield.

"They lack the essential tools to answer those critical questions," said Pew research manager Rosa Castaneda.

"The area where Alabama has the most room for improvement is environmental stewardship," Castaneda said. "The state has goals to preserve the quality of the environment and the quality of life, but the data was from 2005."

While Alabama measures air quality and acres of mitigated wetland, it needs "more timely data," Castaneda said.

The state also needs more current data on how transportation spending supports business development, traffic congestion and access to transit, she said.