

EDITORIAL

Fix our nation's deficient roads



The old expression, “He looks like 10 miles of bad road,” could well be applied to America as a whole.

According to an analysis of the Federal Highway Administration’s most recent data by the national transportation research group

TRIP and USA Today, just 38 percent of the pavement on America’s roads is in “good” condition, while about one in 10 of the nation’s bridges is “structurally deficient.”

This is a disgrace. Federal, state and local funding levels for road and bridge improvements simply cannot meet the nation’s growing needs. About \$85 billion is required annually to improve the condition of roads and bridges — nearly double what was spent in 2008, according to the federal Department of Transportation’s 2010 report to Congress.



With states and municipalities strapped, it is essential for the federal government to step up. Making certain that Americans can get from Point A to Point B safely is surely a bipartisan issue.

But you don’t have to travel from sea to shining sea to discover the deficiencies in the nation’s roads. New Jersey’s Route 9 is a microcosm of the national problem. Its original concrete slabs were laid in the 1930s, and numerous repaving projects over the concrete have since left it rutted and and in bad shape. Its busier sections take a daily beating of almost 80,000 vehicles, including commuter buses and large trucks not permitted on the Garden State Parkway north of Exit 105.



According to the report, Kansas had the highest percentage — 52 percent — of miles of pavement in poor condition, with Connecticut following closely

behind. Then came New Jersey, with 45 percent of its paved roads in poor condition.

Such roads, TRIP says, may have ruts, cracks and potholes that give millions of Americans rough rides. So what? Some say that bad roads are to be expected these days or are a local problem.

But poor roads can cost billions in vehicle repairs and increase the risk of accidents. They also take a toll on the economy and on consumers, who pay more for goods when trucks take longer to get to their destinations. This doesn’t help the already snail-like pace of the nation’s economic recovery.



The roads are getting worse. The TRIP/USA Today analysis, which looked at data for all roads eligible for federal highway funds, including

interstates, highways and other major roads, shows a higher percentage of miles of pavement in poor condition in 2011 than in 2008. This is true despite the availability of \$27 billion in federal stimulus money to improve roads and bridges. That is not to decry the stimulus as a failure; rather, it was a Band-Aid, a temporary fix at best.

America is on the fast track to make the phrase, “You can’t get there from here,” a sad reality if it does not start investing in the arteries of our infrastructure.