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OUR VIEW: Fixing nation's roads would ease job woes

Potholes aren't merely symptoms of bad roads. They're also often symbols of dangerous roads, and Kern County has plenty of them among its 3,100 miles of unincorporated asphalt. California as a whole apparently suffers from similar problems. A new national study ranks the state's rural roads among the worst in the nation. And bad roads can have life-and-death consequences.

The report by TRIP, a national nonprofit transportation research group, ranks California fifth for traffic-related fatalities on rural roads and 15th for percentage of rural roads in poor condition. In 2008, 18 percent of the state's rural roads were rated poor and more than half -- 52 percent -- were just mediocre or fair.

Past studies have shown Kern County roads to be similarly lacking. The American Society of Civil Engineers' 2009 Report Card awarded Kern County a D for its roads, in part because of its shortfall of more than \$200 million in unfunded repairs.

This is more evidence that the United States has a serious infrastructure maintenance deficit. Federal investment in fixing the transportation system would not only benefit rural communities but also address high unemployment plaguing the nation, California and Kern County. The president's Sept. 8 address on jobs should feature a plan for fixing our roads. It's a safety obligation that looms larger every day.