Winter threatens repairs of Irene-damaged roads

By CHRIS HAWLEY

Other states wrestling with post-Irene road repairs include New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina and Virginia.

Brad Sant, vice president of safety for the American Road and Transportation Builders Association, predicted the affected Northern states will have to settle for "Band-Aid" repairs until the spring. Though the level of Irene's road destruction is not unprecedented for a hurricane, "What makes this more challenging is the location of the destruction, being in the Northeast with those early, cold-weather conditions that are likely to come," Sant said.

To help Vermont get an early start, U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood says he will authorize $5 million in "quick-release" rebuilding funds. Damage to the state's federally funded highways alone is expected to top $125 million, LaHood said.

The state owns 360 feet of temporary bridge sections and plans to install them on key spans before winter, Michael Hedges, structures program manager at the Vermont Agency of Transportation, told the Associated Press.

It is also negotiating leases and rent-to-own contracts with three companies to bring in military-style "Bailey bridges," Hedges said. The bridges, made up of 10-foot sections of metal decking, may have to serve for 4 or 5 years until the state can finish permanent repairs, he said.

In New York's Adirondack Mountains, quiet summer brooks turned into torrents that ripped massive holes in the two primary routes around the winter destinations of Lake Placid, Whiteface Mountain and Saranac Lake—economic lifelines as the winter sports season approaches.

Both lanes of Route 73, the easiest way for people from the south to get to the mountains, were sliced clean through in some places, leaving jagged splinters of asphalt dangling over gravel, dirt and rushing water.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo estimated total damage to New York State at about $1 billion, but has not said how much of that is road damage.

In Vermont, some residents were forced to climb along muddy trails to get around gaping road washouts. Some of the washed-out roads have gaping gullies 30 feet deep.

Road building experts say that if the work isn't done by mid-November, winter's cold, ice and snows will prevent any substantial progress until after the spring thaws.

The consequences could be serious: residents forced to make 30-mile detours — on mountain roads, some of them unpaved — to the nearest grocery store or doctor, businesses struggling for customers and a possible hit to the state's all-important winter tourism.

"The window is short," said Cathy Voyer, president of the Vermont chapter of the Associated General Contractors of America.

"You can't pour concrete, you can't pour asphalt. Stabilizing cranes in the winter would be very difficult."