32% of Michigan roads in poor condition, 12% bridges are deficient

Not even half of U.S. roads earn 'good' rating


decent. Though poor pavement conditions do cost consumers billions annually in vehicle repairs and operating costs, safety is undermined in the worst cases. Slower travel and delayed freight transportation can also increase costs for motorists and industries.

The TRIP/USA Today analysis, which looked at data for all roads eligible for federal highway funds, shows a higher percentage of miles of pavement in poor condition in 2011 (21.4 percent) than in 2008 (20.7 percent).

Though the increase was slight, it is significant because the dip comes in the wake of $27 billion in federal stimulus money to improve roads and bridges. That jolt of funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 improved 42,000 miles of road and 2,700 bridges.

Kansas tops the list

Kansas had the highest percentage — 52 percent — of miles of pavement in poor condition, with Connecticut following closely. Then came New Jersey, 45 percent; Hawaii, 39 percent; California, 37 percent; and Oklahoma, 36 percent. Michigan came in ninth place with 32 percent.

Kansas has a much higher overall percentage of pavement in poor condition because many of the state’s secondary roads are in disrepair. Yet its major roads and interstate highways — which carry the bulk of traffic — are better off, with only 6 percent in poor condition.

“If one looks at vehicle miles traveled, our roads are not considered poor,” says Kansas Department of Transportation spokesperson Steve Swartz.

Jerry Younger, the department’s deputy secretary and the state’s transportation engineer, says Kansas doesn’t have the financial resources to improve secondary roads and — like many other states — must focus on the most-traveled ones.

The Federal Highway Administration says the picture of America’s roadways is better than the one painted by the USA Today analysis. The agency says the debate should focus on roads with more traffic.

Using such a measure, the FHWA says its data show that the share of travel occurring on roads in good condition improved from 46 percent in 2008 to 48 percent in 2011. Yet, like the TRIP/USA Today analysis, the FHWA analysis shows that the percentage of travel occurring on roads in poor condition increased slightly from 15 percent in 2008 to 15.3 percent in 2011.

U.S. bridges falling

Many bridges are also withering. About 11 percent of the nation’s bridges are “structurally deficient,” and about 14 percent are “functionally obsolete,” the analysis of FHWA data for bridges 20 feet or longer shows.

In five states — Pennsylvania, Iowa, Oklahoma, Rhode Island and South Dakota — at least 20 percent of bridges are structurally deficient or