



Report: Maine's Rural Roads and Bridges Among Nation's Worst

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It may come as no surprise that Maine ranks poorly on the list of states in need of major bridge and highway repairs. A new report ranking the quality of rural roads lists Maine as 14th from the bottom. The national transportation research group known as The Road Information Program--or TRIP--says that, in addition to poor roads, Maine also ranks 12th from the bottom when it comes to the condition of rural bridges in the state.

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According to the recently released [TRIP](#) report, Maine's rural roads and bridges are among the worst in the country. But a spokeswoman for the national group says that's a distinction the state shares with the rest of the Northeast region.

"The Northeast states were overrepresented somewhat in our study," Carol Bonifas says. "There were several of them that turned up in the top 20, not only for deficient road and bridge conditions but for their rural fatality rates."

Bonifas says part of that can be attributed to the region's rough winter weather. "The freeze/frost cycle can have a very detrimental effect on pavement conditions, so that makes maintaining them even more difficult, and you've also got a much shorter season in which to make those needed repairs. So that may be part of what makes the Northeast area overrepresented in our study."

But the reduction of state dollars for infrastructure improvements is something that nearly all states are experiencing, Bonifas says, and that situation is not helped by decreasing federal highway funds from Washington. She says her group would like its study to serve as a tool for public policy makers as they make transportation funding decisions.

At the state Department of Transportation, spokesman Mark Latti says Maine strives to do the most that it can with its highway repair funds.

"But if you look at the statistics, we're either tied or ahead of New Hampshire," he says. "So I think we're

doing a good job of managing the dollars that we have and focusing our dollars where they're needed, and trying to get the most out of them."

"Most people who spend any time in their car know that we have a lot of bad roads," says Maria Fuentes of the Maine Better Transportation Association.

Fuentes says the state simply needs more money to keep apace with a significant maintenance schedule. To that end, she hopes that the LePage administration and majority Republicans in the Legislature will consider approving a transportation bond for Maine voters to consider in the next year's legislative session.

There was not much support for that proposal this year, but Fuentes remains hopeful. "You know I've heard from a number of people that there is interest in an infrastructure bond, and I think that certainly the governor has indicated that he wants to make transportation more of a priority," Fuentes says.

"Bonding for our highways and bridges just makes sense because it's needed, it keeps the infrastructure going and it creates jobs for Maine people," says state Sen. Troy Jackson, a Democrat from Allagash.

Jackson says that while the state has its share of deteriorating rural roads, northern Maine's highways are in need of major repairs, largely because they serve as the trucking routes that connect the region's industry with the rest of the country.

But while he and other Democrats in the Senate express support for transportation bonds, Republicans, such as Sen. Doug Thomas, of Ripley, are opposed.

"When you add the cost to bond, bond is borrowing," he says. "That means that you pay interest, you pay the bond bank to sell those bonds, you pay some kind of a sales agent; and so you add all those fees on and the money to pay that back still has to come from taxes--so, what's the difference?" Thomas says.

When lawmakers return next year, they may also explore increasing highway maintenance by making larger transfers from the state's general fund.