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## Missouri roads and bridges suffering from lack of investment

**Josh Nelson**  
for the News-Leader

A lack of investment in Missouri's rural roads and bridges is creating dangers for both motorists and commercial carriers alike, a national transportation group said in a recent report.

TRIP, a research group based in Washington, released its findings in a report Thursday. In the last year, the group found 18 percent of the state's bridges were "structurally deficient" and another 20 percent of the rural roads were "functionally obsolete."

That was the 12th highest percentage of obsolete roads in the country, TRIP said.

"The condition and safety of these roads and bridges is critically important to the hundreds of thousands of Missourians who live and make their living in the state's rural areas. While progress has been made, there is still much left to be done," Doug Smith, president of the Associated General Contractors of Missouri, said in a release from TRIP.

According to the group, Missouri saw a fatality rate of 2.31 deaths per 100 million cars on non-Interstate rural roads in 2009. The national rate is 0.75 deaths. Missouri's fatality rate ranks 20th nationally.

In 2009, rural traffic fatalities also accounted for 60 percent of the total highway-related deaths in the state.

Will Wilkins, TRIP's executive director, said similar issues were noted in other states like Nevada and Oregon, which rank above Missouri in rates of highway deaths. The group faulted federal lawmakers for being "stuck in political gridlock" on transportation funding, which could help rectify the safety problems.

"The safety and quality of life in America's small communities and rural areas and the health of the nation's economy ride on our rural transportation system," Wilkins said in a statement.

The report focused on rural areas with populations of less than 5,000 people. Factors affecting rural roads include population shifts and growth in domestic energy production, such as ethanol. Often, plants are located on farm-to-market roads and have frequent semitrailer traffic moving products in and out the area. Increased use causes roads to deteriorate faster.

The deterioration affects more than 50 million people nationwide, the group said.

According to its website, TRIP is a non-profit group pushing for transportation improvements. It is funded by insurance companies, equipment manufacturers, highway and transit companies and labor unions, among others.