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Not even half of U.S. roads rated 'good' Kansas, Connecticut take spots No. 1 and 2 worst spots in analysis



A hilly, winding road in New Fairfield, Conn., is cracked and recessed on the edges. Almost half the state's major roads are rated 'poor.' / Robert Deutsch, /USA Today

Written by Gary Stoller
USA Today

NEW FAIRFIELD, CONN. — Cracked asphalt jolts cars on a less-than-1-mile stretch of Connecticut road, making it clear why state transportation officials grade the pavement as being in poor condition.

Edges of the two-lane road that connects Route 39 to the New York border — a sign says Col. Henry Ludington passed by in 1777 to repel “British raiders” — are worn, allowing rainwater to pool.

Connecticut has the nation's second-highest percentage of major roads — 48 percent, or 1,268 miles — with pavement in “poor” condition, and 25 other states have 20 percent or more in such condition, according to an analysis of the Federal Highway Administration's most recent data by transportation research group TRIP and USA Today.

Just 38 percent of the pavement on roads stretching miles across the U.S. is in “good” condition, according to the analysis, while about one in

10 of the nation's bridges are “structurally deficient.”

The analysis concludes that the nation's roadways are in disrepair, and even states with mostly “good” roads have stretches of pavement, as well as bridges, that are in dire need of upgrades.

State, federal and local funding levels for road and bridge improvements are not adequate to meet the nation's growing needs. About \$85 billion is required annually to improve the condition of roads and bridges — nearly double what was spent in 2008, according to the Department of Transportation's 2010 report to Congress.

Route 9 in south-central New Jersey is what suburban highway deterioration looks like.

Its original concrete slabs were laid in the 1930s, and numerous repaving projects over the concrete have since made its pavement resemble an old pair of blue jeans — still intact but patched and stitched together.

Route 9's busier sections take a daily beating of almost 80,000 vehicles, including commuter buses and large trucks not permitted on the Garden State Parkway north of Exit 105.

“It's rippled like a washboard — you hydroplane when it's wet,” says motorist Lloyd Stone of Manalapan.

The cumulative cost of these tattered roads isn't just about dollars and cents. 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 had the highest percentage — 52 percent — of miles of pavement in poor condition, with Connecticut following closely.

THEN THERE ARE THOSE PESKY POTHOLES

These creaky bridges and pockmarked roads are testing the patience of drivers.

- Kevin Korterud of New Albany, Ohio, saw firsthand what a bad road can do while traveling with his family between Chicago and Indianapolis last spring.
- While heading south on Interstate 65, his car hit “a massive pothole.” The impact was so hard a general warning light came on, and a front fog light blew out, he says.
- “I swerved into the left lane, and, if I had hit the pothole head-on, we could have gone out of control,” recalls Korterud, who spent \$37 to replace the broken light.