

TRIP report reveals funding shortfall in New Jersey

Estimated shortfall of \$35 billion over the next ten years indicates a funding boost is needed

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A report from TRIP, a national transportation research group, concludes that even with stimulus funding, New Jersey needs a substantial, long-term boost in state or federal highway funding.

The recently approved economic stimulus package will offer a significant, short-term boost in transportation funding in New Jersey by providing a total of approximately \$1.1 billion, including \$652 million for road and bridge improvements and \$424 million for the state's public transit system. However, this funding will be inadequate to allow the state to proceed with many needed long-term projects that will improve safety, reduce congestion, expand capacity, maintain a state of good repair and modernize the surface transportation system.

Over the next ten years, New Jersey faces an estimated transportation funding shortfall of \$35 billion. In 2008, a 10-year statewide capital investment strategy found that approximately \$70 billion will be needed from 2009 to 2018 to improve road and bridge conditions, mitigate congestion, increase highway safety and improve New Jersey's public transit system. However, based on current funding projections, only \$35 billion will be available during that time. Because of this funding shortfall, numerous projects needed to maintain and expand the current transportation system will not be able to move forward without a significant, long-term boost in state and federal funding.

The TRIP report says it is imperative to New Jersey and other states that Congress acts expeditiously to approve a new federal surface transportation program. The current six-year program, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act—A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), expires on Sept. 30, 2009.

New Jersey's funding shortfall has been exacerbated by the rapid increases in the price of key materials needed for highway and bridge construction. The average cost of materials used for highway and bridge construction—including asphalt, concrete, steel, lumber and diesel—increased by 40% over the five-year period from March 2004 to March 2009.

Road Condition

In 2007, 46% of major roads and highways in New Jersey were rated in deficient condition. Roads rated in deficient condition often have significant rutting, potholes or other visible signs of deterioration and typically need to be resurfaced or reconstructed.

Roads in need of repair cost each New Jersey motorist an average of \$596 annually in extra vehicle operating costs—the highest in the nation and nearly double the national average of \$335. Driving on roads in need of repair costs the state's motorists a total of \$3.5 billion each year.

Bridges

Approximately one-third of New Jersey's 6,447 bridges show significant deterioration or do not meet current design standards. This includes all bridges that are 20 ft or more in length and are maintained by state, local and federal agencies.

Nearly 13% of New Jersey's bridges were structurally deficient in 2008, indicating significant deterioration of the bridge deck, supports or other major components.

In 2008, 23% of New Jersey's bridges were functionally obsolete, meaning they no longer meet current highway design standards, often because of narrow lanes and shoulders, inadequate clearances or poor alignment.

At present, 15% of state bridges, 31% of county/municipal bridges, 59% of NJ TRANSIT bridges and 38% of private bridges are older than 75 years. While the average design life expectancy of a new bridge is 75 years, many older bridges were built with a life expectancy of only 50 years. The average age of bridges in New Jersey is 49 years.

The full report is available at www.tripnet.org.

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