Pennsylvania’s rural roadways and bridges are among the most deadly and least maintained in the country, a study released Tuesday shows.

While maintaining aging roadways, bridges and related infrastructure is a challenge across the country, maintenance and safety are a particular problem in rural areas, according to TRIP, a national nonprofit organization that reviews land-based transportation data. Although fewer motorists travel in rural areas, they often must drive farther to shop, work and receive services like seeing a doctor, the study found.

The roads they use tend to have fewer safety features than urban thoroughfares. Country roads are more likely to have narrow lanes, sharp curves and limited shoulders, the study found. The lack of development also means the country roads tend to have fewer intersections and traffic lights. That means drivers in rural areas are more likely to be going faster for the roads they’re on, increasing their safety risks, the study found.

Those issues combine for deadly results.

Nationally, for every 100 million vehicle miles traveled on non-interstate rural roads, there were 2.18 traffic fatalities in 2015, the study shows. On all other roads, the rate of fatalities fell to 0.83 fatalities. Put another way, rural non-interstate routes saw just 22 percent of the country’s travel, but had 43 percent of its traffic deaths.

Pennsylvania’s safety record sometimes matched and sometimes trailed the national trends, the study found.

Of the 1,200 people killed in Pennsylvania traffic accidents in 2015, 565 of them, or 47 percent, died on rural non-interstate roadways. The state’s fatality rate on those roads ranked 16th highest in the country at 2.33, while the rate on the state’s other roadways matched the national average of 0.83.

Decrepit rural bridges add to the danger, the study found. As of 2015, 22 percent of Pennsylvania’s rural bridges were structurally deficient, meaning their decks, supports or other major components had significantly deteriorated. That ranked the Keystone State as the third worst in the country, a fraction of a percentage point behind Rhode Island for worst in the country, according to TRIP.

Rural roads weren’t much better. The study found 22 percent of Pennsylvania’s rural roads were in poor condition, ranking eighth worst behind Rhode Island’s 41 percent.

State officials have taken steps to help address the problems.

In 2013, Gov. Tom Corbett signed a law setting aside $1.8 billion to repair bridges and roadways across the commonwealth, including rural areas. In 2016, Gov. Tom Wolf shifted $802 million to address highway needs, including 18,000 miles of state-controlled roads in low-volume, rural areas.

Wolf hopes to steer another $63 million toward all transportation needs in the fiscal year that starts Saturday, said Richard Kirkland, a PennDOT spokesman. He has asked the Legislature to enact a $25 per capita fee on municipalities who rely on state police for local police coverage.

TRIP describes itself as being funded by businesses involved in highway and transit engineering and construction, labor unions, insurance companies and equipment manufacturers.

RURAL ROAD SAFETY

According to TRIP, a nonprofit organization that studies ground-based transportation nationally, Pennsylvania’s rural roads are in worse shape and more deadly than their urban counterparts.

- Of the 1,200 people who died in Pennsylvania traffic accidents in 2015, 565 — 47 percent — died on rural non-interstate highways. The national average was 43 percent.
- 22 percent of Pennsylvania rural, non-interstate roads are in poor condition, eclipsing the national average of 15 percent.
- Among Pennsylvania’s rural bridges, 22 percent are structurally deficient. Nationally, 10 percent of bridges are structurally deficient.

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Pennsylvania’s rural roadways and bridges are among the most deadly and least maintained in the country. (MORNING CALL FILE PHOTO)