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TRIP Details Danger of Deteriorating Rural Roads

A report by TRIP, a national non-profit transportation research group, found rural roads to be America's worst and most dangerous.

According to a new report, rural road infrastructure faces a number of significant challenges, including inadequate capacity to handle the growing levels of traffic and commerce, limited connectivity, and the inability to accommodate growing freight travel. Deteriorated road and bridge conditions and lack of safety features contribute to a traffic fatality rate far higher than all other roads and highways.

The report, "[Rural Connections: Challenges and Opportunities in America's Heartland](#)," defines rural America as all places and people living outside the primary daily commuting zones of cities with 50,000 people or more.

TRIP, formerly known as The Road Information Project, found that despite a recent decrease in the overall fatality rate on the nation's roads, traffic crashes and fatalities on rural roads remain disproportionately high, occurring at a rate more than three times higher than all other roads.

In 2009, non-Interstate rural roads had a traffic fatality rate of 2.31 deaths for every 100 million vehicle-miles of travel, compared to a fatality rate on all other roads of

0.75 deaths per 100 million vehicle-miles of travel. And although they carry only 25% of all vehicle miles of travel in the U.S., crashes on the nation's rural, non-Interstate routes resulted in 51% of the nation's 33,808 traffic deaths in 2009.

Inadequate roadway safety design, longer emergency vehicle response times and the higher speeds traveled on rural roads are factors in the higher traffic fatality rate.

In addition to disproportionately high traffic fatality rates, the roads and bridges in rural America have significant deficiencies. In 2008, 12% of the nation's major rural roads were rated in poor condition and another 43% were rated in mediocre or fair condition. In 2010, 13% of the nation's rural bridges were rated as structurally deficient and 10% were functionally obsolete.

Among the report's recommendations:

- * Widen and extend key highway routes, including Interstates. The report found construction of an additional 30,000 lane miles of limited access highways, largely along existing corridors, is needed to address the nation's need for increased rural connectivity.

- * Modernize major two-lane roads and highways so they can accommodate increased personal

and commercial travel.

- * Implement cost-effective roadway safety improvements, including rumble strips, shoulder improvements, lane widening, curve reductions, skid resistant surfaces at curves, passing lanes, intersection improvements and improved signage, pavement markings and lighting, guardrails and barriers, and improved shielding of obstacles.

- * Adequately fund local and state transportation programs to ensure preservation of rural roads, highways and bridges to maintain transportation service and also to accommodate large truck travel, which is needed to support the rural economy.

TRIP pushed for better funding to do this:

"Congress must not delay in passing a robust, multi-year highway and transit bill in order to address the transportation challenges faced in rural America and the nation as a whole," said John Horsley, executive director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. "The reauthorization of SAFETEA-LU is a key opportunity to move U.S. infrastructure into the 21st century, bolster economic recovery efforts, and improve the quality of life in every corner of our nation."