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WEST VIRGINIA’S RURAL ROADS ARE SEVENTH MOST DEFICIENT IN NATION, STATE’S RURAL TRAFFIC FATALITY RATE IS FOURTEENTH HIGHEST IN U.S. NATION’S RURAL ROADS ARE DETERIORATED AND MAY NOT SUPPORT ECONOMIC GROWTH AND MOBILITY DEMANDS.

Washington, D.C.- America’s rural heartland is home to approximately 50 million people and its natural resources provide the primary source of the energy, food and fiber that supports the nation’s economy and way of life. But, according to a new report, the roads and bridges that serve and connect the nation’s rural areas face a number of significant challenges, including inadequate capacity to handle the growing levels of traffic and commerce, limited connectivity, the inability to accommodate growing freight travel, deteriorated road and bridge conditions, a lack of desirable safety features, and a traffic fatality rate far higher than all other roads and highways. The report, “[Rural Connections: Challenges and Opportunities in America’s Heartland](#),” was released today by TRIP, a national non-profit transportation research group based in Washington, D.C. It defines Rural America as all places and people living outside the primary daily commuting zones of cities with 50,000 people or more.

	STATE	Fatality Rate Rural / All Other Roads	STATE	Total Rural Fatalities	STATE	Percent Rural Roads in Poor Condition	STATE	Percent Deficient Rural Bridges
1	South Carolina	4.70 / 0.32	Texas	1,490	Vermont	36	Pennsylvania	28
2	Florida	3.47 / 0.98	California	1,164	Idaho	31	Rhode Island	26
3	Rhode Island	2.99 / 0.89	North Carolina	907	Oklahoma	30	Oklahoma	23
4	Arkansas	2.89 / 0.89	Florida	906	Rhode Island	30	Iowa	23
5	California	2.86 / 0.68	South Carolina	791	Hawaii	29	South Dakota	21
6	Texas	2.83 / 0.89	Pennsylvania	611	Kansas	28	Nebraska	19
7	Kentucky	2.82 / 0.78	Ohio	601	West Virginia	27	Missouri	18
8	Arizona	2.78 / 0.98	Kentucky	584	Arkansas	23	North Dakota	17
9	Montana	2.76 / 1.14	Missouri	533	New Hampshire	21	Mississippi	16
10	North Dakota	2.75 / 0.48	Georgia	527	New Mexico	21	Hawaii	16
11	North Carolina	2.74 / 0.43	New York	524	Alaska	20	New Hampshire	15
12	Oklahoma	2.71 / 0.96	Tennessee	519	Missouri	20	Maine	15
13	Tennessee	2.68 / 0.92	Mississippi	464	Connecticut	19	Louisiana	15
14	West Virginia	2.62 / 1.21	Alabama	449	Maine	19	North Carolina	14
15	Louisiana	2.57 / 1.49	Oklahoma	444	California	18	New York	14
16	Kansas	2.50 / 0.57	Arkansas	418	Pennsylvania	17	Michigan	14
17	Delaware	2.41 / 0.79	Virginia	371	South Dakota	17	West Virginia	14
18	Oregon	2.34 / 0.53	Michigan	369	Michigan	16	South Carolina	14
19	Nevada	2.33 / 0.98	Indiana	365	Illinois	16	California	14
20	Missouri	2.31 / 0.75	Wisconsin	363	Mississippi	15	New Jersey	13

According to the TRIP report, in 2008, 27 percent of the state's major rural roads were rated in poor condition, the seventh highest rate in the U.S. An additional 50 percent of major rural roads were rated in mediocre or fair condition. In 2010, 14 percent of West Virginia's rural bridges were rated as structurally deficient, the seventeenth highest rate in the nation. An additional 21 percent of the state's rural bridges were functionally obsolete.

Despite a recent decrease in the overall fatality rate on America's roads, traffic crashes and fatalities on West Virginia's rural roads remain disproportionately high, occurring at a rate more than two times higher than on all other roads. The traffic fatality rate on the state's rural, non-Interstate roads was the fourteenth highest in the nation. In 2009, West Virginia's non-Interstate rural roads had a traffic fatality rate of 2.62 deaths for every 100 million vehicle miles of travel, compared to a fatality rate on all other roads of 1.21 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles of travel. Of the 356 traffic fatalities that occurred in West Virginia in 2009, 221 were on rural, non-Interstate roads. 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.

"All of West Virginia's highway system is in jeopardy if Congress doesn't take action by September 30 to reauthorize the federal aid highway program," said Mike Clowser, executive director of the Contractors Association of West Virginia (CAWV). "One proposal would reduce West Virginia's annual federal highway dollars by \$141 million, a drop of 35 percent. Our state's roads and bridges will continue to deteriorate if Washington does not pass a reauthorization bill and at the current funding level."

"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. This backbone of the heartland allows mobility and connectivity for millions of rural Americans and provides crucial links from farm to market, moves manufactured and energy products, and provides access to countless tourist and recreational destinations," said Will Wilkins, executive director of TRIP. "But, with long-term federal transportation legislation stuck in political gridlock in Washington, America's rural communities and economies could face even higher unemployment and decline. Funding the modernization of our rural transportation system will create jobs and help ensure long-term economic development and quality of life in rural America."

According to the TRIP report, America must adopt transportation policies that will improve rural transportation connectivity, safety and conditions to provide the nation's small communities and rural areas with the level of safe and efficient access that will support quality of life and enhance economic productivity. This can be done, in part, by modernizing and extending key routes to accommodate personal and commercial travel, improving public transit access to rural areas, implementing needed roadway safety improvements, improving emergency response times, and adequately funding state and local transportation programs to insure sufficient preservation and maintenance of rural transportation assets.