WEATHER: Breezy and mild vith some showers High 66 Details, C8

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Question 3 asks voters to approve \$105 million bond for roads and bridges

The money would be spent on highway construction, ports, railroads and stream crossing improvements.

By Peter McGuire, Staff Writer

Voters on Tuesday will be asked to approve borrowing \$105 million to fund repairs and improvements to the state's transportation infrastructure.

Question 3 on the ballot is a transportation bond that will be used to match about \$137 million in federal and other funding.

The general obligation bond is the second of three consecutive years of borrowing planned by the Maine Department of Transportation to fill annual highway funding shortfalls. Voters overwhelmingly approved a \$100 million bond in 2016 and another is planned for the November 2018 ballot. Despite the borrowing, Maine DOT has a \$59 million annual funding gap for work on roads and bridges.

"Every state's transportation needs exceed available funding – we need to be creative in how we fund transportation projects," said Maine DOT spokesman Ted Talbot. If approved, \$80 million of the bond will be directed to repair priority roads and bridges and \$20 million will be spent on seaports and airports, freight and passenger railroads and pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.

The remaining \$5 million would fund a competitive grant program through the Maine Department of Environmental Protection to provide matching funds for upgrades to municipal culverts at stream crossings.

The total lifetime cost of the 10-year bond would be almost \$134 million, including nearly \$29 million in interest, according to the Office of the Treasurer.

"The reality is, Maine DOT depends on the passage of this bond to deliver the essential road and bridge projects it has outlined in its three-year work plan," said Maria Fuentes, executive director of the Maine Better Transportation

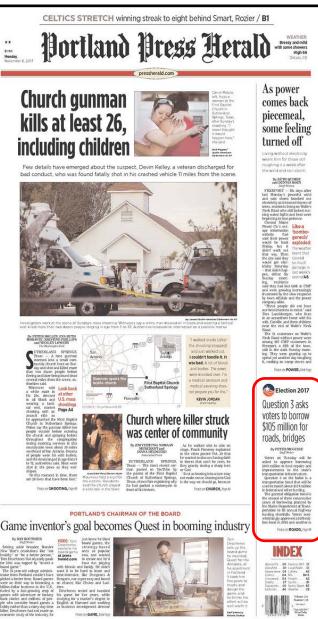
Association, a trade group that lobbies for highway projects. "This bond is desperately needed to prevent cuts to the existing Maine DOT work plan."

In a report released last week, TRIP, a national transportation research group, estimated that 14 percent of Maine's state and locally maintained bridges are structurally deficient, the ninthhighest rate in the U.S. The group considers a bridge structurally deficient if there is significant deterioration of the bridge deck, supports or important components.

A 2016 report card from the American Society of Civil Engineers gave Maine bridges a C- and Maine roads a D, grades unchanged since the group's last report in 2012. Maine lawmakers have for years debated how to generate more revenue for the state's highway fund to overcome persistent budget shortfalls. This session, legislators considered bills to

increase the gas tax and add fees for electric cars, but none made it past the transportation committee.

Maine voters typically support transportation bonding. Last year, a \$100 million bond was approved with 61 percent of the vote, and an \$85 million



transportation bond received 73 percent of the vote in 2015. Another \$100 million bond was passed with 71 percent of the vote in 2013, according to Secretary of State's Office records.