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National study finds state's bridges, traffic among the worst in country

By Eric Bedner
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A new national study says the structural integrity of Connecticut's bridges are among the five worst in the country and traffic on its interstates also ranks among the worst.

According to a report released Monday by TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based national transportation organization, 7 percent of the state's interstate bridges are "structurally deficient," the fifth worst rating in the country, which averages 3 percent, according to the report.

Structurally deficient bridges often have deterioration of the major components of the bridge, the report states.

The report says that while the condition of bridges is acceptable, "some deficiencies exist," and 14 percent of the state's pavements are in poor or mediocre condition, compared to the national average of 12 percent.

Seven percent of the state's bridges are structurally deficient and 19 percent are functionally obsolete, compared to 3 percent and 18 percent, respectively, for each category nationally, according to the report.

"Structurally deficient bridges have significant deterioration of

the major components of the bridge, while functionally obsolete bridges no longer meet modern design standards, often because of narrow lanes, inadequate clearances, or poor alignment," according to the report. "Bridges that are rated structurally deficient show significant signs of deterioration as a result of use and exposure."

The Federal Highway Administration defines a structurally deficient bridge as one that requires immediate rehabilitation to remain open, is restricted to carrying lighter-weight vehicles, or is closed.

Additionally, the state's urban interstates have the third highest rate of traffic per lane mile, and are eighth most congested with 60 percent of city highways experiencing congestion during peak hours.

The report "finds that the Interstate Highway System faces increasing congestion, unprecedented levels of travel — particularly by large trucks — and insufficient funding to make needed repairs and improvements."

"While we celebrate the 60th anniversary of our Interstate Highway System, the record number of motorists using it are all too aware of the need for improvements," AAA spokeswoman Amy Parmenter

said. "If we want to be in a better place down the road, the importance of funding these improvements cannot be understated."

Although the nation's highway system represents only about 2.5 percent of lane miles in the U.S., it carries 25 percent of the nation's traffic.

"Moving products and people quickly and efficiently is a major concern for Connecticut's business leaders," Eric Gjede, assistant counsel for the Connecticut Business and Industry Association, said.

He noted that congestion deters a variety of services, including delivery deadlines, customer support, territories, and markets, as well as extending commutes, which presents "quality of life issues."

"Improving and expanding our interstate system is crucial for Connecticut's economic success and vital for every individual, family, and community," Gjede said.

"Connecticut and the Northeast are the poster child for congestion," Jack Condin, president and CEO of the Stamford Chamber of Commerce. "Federal funding is the lifeblood that is needed to solve the interstate system challenge. The time to act is now."