



Maine Voters to Decide Fate of \$105M Borrowing Package for Roads, Bridges

By [Irwin Gratz](#) • November 1, 2017

Next week, Maine voters will be asked to weigh in another \$105 million in borrowing to pay for needed transportation infrastructure. This week, a lobbying group called TRIP released its latest assessment of one segment of that transportation infrastructure: bridges.

The TRIP assessment: 14 percent of Maine bridges remain structurally deficient. The group says that's the ninth highest percentage in the nation.

But state transportation official Andrew Bickmore says the 14 percent figure may not be as bad as it sounds

"That takes into account if there's a significant element of the bridge that has been rated in poor condition, by bridge inspectors. What that doesn't take into account is the size or the priority of those bridges," Bickmore says. "So, it can be somewhat misleading."

The TRIP report also details where the highest percentage of structurally deficient bridges are located: Hancock, Knox, and Washington counties. Bickmore says the state doesn't hide the fact that the amount of money it has to spend on bridge upkeep isn't enough.

"Well, in 2014, Maine DOT (Department of Transportation) completed its second "Keeping Our Bridges Safe" report. And in that report, it indicated the need for maintaining current conditions of bridges was 140 million dollars annually," he says. "In the recent past, we've been investing at a level at around \$115 million a year, including all of our preservation and maintenance work for bridges. So, certainly, we're not at the level where we can maintain current conditions."

Part of the bond issue, some \$20 million in borrowing, will be used for "multi-modal" projects: rail improvements, bike lanes and walking paths, among other things. But the bond money will also draw federal funding, which is why the state's bridge program would have a total of \$115 million to work with.

"Our \$115 million investment level assumes that the bond resource is available to us," Bickmore says. "And we've put a firm sight on doing preservation work where possible to extend the life of our critical bridges around the state as much as possible. So, that's where a large portion of that funding will go. That includes things like deck replacement, wearing surfaces, bridge painting, joint repair, etcetera - all things that will extend the life of a bridge."

The bond issue voters will consider next week is one of two authorized by the Legislature earlier this year. Another borrowing package is already planned to go before voters next year.

But state officials say it will take more federal funding for the state to adequately maintain its road and bridge network. One of President Trump's campaign promises was a trillion dollars, national infrastructure program. So far, no such program has been proposed to Congress.