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Report: Most Twin Cities Transportation Projects Face Funding Red Light



By: Stephen Tellier

Experts say Minnesota is approaching a cliff when it comes to paying for our state's infrastructure. A new report released on Wednesday shows our [roads, highways, and transit systems are in desperate need of updating and overhauling](#). But the path to improvement is littered with pitfalls and potholes -- both literal and figurative.

"Our Minnesota has turned into the Land of 10,000 Potholes," said Toni Carter, a Ramsey County Commissioner.

And winter isn't only to blame.

Minnesota's transportation system is deteriorating -- and it needs dollars.

"The state, at this point, is not able to move forward with many critically needed projects that are very vital to this region," said Rocky Moretti, Director of Policy and Research for TRIP, a national transportation research and advocacy group.

TRIP rated 20 projects deemed critical to the Twin Cities metro according to the availability of funding for each. Only one received a green light. Five were yellow-lighted, and 14 were rated red lights.

"For the region to move forward, these critical projects need to go from red lights to green lights," Moretti said.

Among the projects highlighted in the report are the re-decking and repairing the Interstate 35W bridge in Burnsville over the Minnesota river, at a cost of \$100 million, pavement repairs on Interstate 94 between Minneapolis and St. Paul, at a cost of \$300 million, and the Southwest Light Rail project, expected to cost more than \$1.5 billion.

The report also urged an increase in funding for simple, routine maintenance on roads across Minnesota.

If you add up all the projects the report listed as critical for Minnesota, the price tag is a minimum of \$4.28 billion.

So where will all of that money come from?

"The money comes from the gas tax," said El Tinklenberg, a former state transportation commissioner.

He said the State of Minnesota is in a state of denial over the tough choices that must be made.

"We need to have a steady increase in that gas tax so that we can keep up with the maintenance of our infrastructure," Tinklenberg said.

Tinklenberg admitted that in the current political climate, such a gas tax increase is unlikely. But he said change can happen -- if state leaders push for it.

"How many reports do we have to see before we really take seriously the fact that we are falling desperately behind in the maintenance and repair of our infrastructure?" Tinklenberg asked.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation points out that two years ago, the Transportation Finance Advisory Committee found that over the next 20 years, Minnesota is facing a \$12 billion transportation funding gap -- and that's just for roads and bridges. A spokesman also said while the TRIP report focuses mostly on capital improvements and brand new infrastructure, there is also a significant need to maintain the current system and keep it healthy and efficient.