Report offers assessment of state’s roads

By Paul B. Johnson
ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER

HIGH POINT — North Carolina and the Piedmont Triad face a bumpy road addressing long-term highway and bridge needs, according to a report released Thursday by a national transportation group.

The state lags behind funding new roadway construction and maintenance needs compared to the increasing amount of car and truck travel, say officials with the national transportation research group The Road Information Program. In a 27-page report, TRIP found that 18 percent of North Carolina’s major urban roads and highways have pavement in poor condition, while 26 percent are rated in mediocre condition. The Triad, including the High Point area, reflects the state’s roadway plight, with 41 percent of major roads in poor or mediocre condition.

“With an already large transportation funding shortfall, North Carolina is poised to see increasingly deteriorated and congested roads in the future,” said Will Wilkins, executive director of TRIP.

The deterioration of roadways and bridges has implications for job creation and economic development, Wilkins said, since companies examine a state or region’s transportation network when making decisions about new or expanding operations.

One sign of the daunting task for North Carolina is reflected in the request for road needs by communities compared to the money available for projects. The N.C. Department of Transportation received requests from state and regional transportation agencies for $53 billion in road, highway and bridge projects for inclusion in the 10-year State Transportation Improvement Program. But the state had funding available to include $9 billion, or 17 percent of projects, in the roadwork master plan document, according to TRIP.

At the same time, with the steady growth of the state’s population, the highways and bridges of North Carolina are getting a heavier workout. Vehicle miles of travel across the state increased 29 percent from 2000-16, the ninth-highest rate of growth nationally, TRIP said.

TRIP released its report as the N.C. General Assembly gears up its budget deliberations for the upcoming 2017-18 fiscal year, which begins July 1. In releasing its $22.9 billion budget proposal this past Tuesday, the Senate Republican leadership highlighted appropriation requests for transportation needs. They include:

• Increasing funding for the N.C. Department of Transportation’s long-range improvement program by $320 million, which will permit 100 new projects over the next 10 years

• Spending $246 million on structurally deficient bridges statewide

• Investing $40 million for immediate needs that improve roadway safety, reduce congestion and prompt economic development

• Adding $130 million to improve the condition and safety of roadways and increase funding for pavement work by $70 million

johnson@hpnewes.com | 336-888-3528 | @HPEpaul