

## Rural Roads and Bridges Need Additional Attention for Safety, Connectivity, and Economy, According to Report

According to a report released Thursday by transportation nonprofit TRIP, rural communities across the country face a backlog of deficient roads and bridges, higher vehicle crash rates, and connectivity and capacity issues.

TRIP's report, "[Rural Connections: Challenges and Opportunities in America's Heartland](#)," said rural roadways experience traffic crash and fatality rates nearly three times higher than all other roadways. For example, in 2012, non-Interstate rural roads had a traffic fatality rate of 2.21 deaths for every 100 million vehicle miles of travel. That number was .78 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles of travel on all other roads.

In addition to safety issues, roads and bridges in rural areas suffer from more deterioration in general. In 2012, 15 percent of the nation's major rural roads were identified as being in "poor" condition and another 40 percent were considered "mediocre" or "fair," while 12 percent of rural bridges were identified as structurally deficient and another 10 percent were considered functionally obsolete. And while those roads and bridges might not carry as many vehicles as their city counterparts, they are responsible for carrying many of the nation's goods from farms and oil and gas fields. The current transportation infrastructure in place to move those goods is not always adequate to carry large trucks due to deterioration or the fact that it was not originally built to deal with those vehicles in their current volume, as the average travel per-lane mile by large trucks on non-arterial rural roads in the nation has increased 16 percent from 2000 to 2012.

The report found that the U.S. should "adopt transportation policies that will improve rural transportation connectivity, safety and conditions to provide the nation's small communities and rural areas with safe and efficient access to support quality of life and enhance economic productivity." Many transportation organizations have already begun to build on these ideas.

"Reports like this show that the U.S. must continue to invest in transportation infrastructure to ensure that whether someone lives in rural or suburban areas they have access to economic opportunities and a high quality of life," said AASHTO Executive Director Bud Wright. "State departments of transportation are among the many agencies and organizations concerned with improving roadway safety for all users—motorists, transit riders, bicyclists and pedestrians. AASHTO has adopted a national highway safety strategy—Toward Zero Deaths—that is intended to help eliminate roadway fatalities. Even one fatality is too many."

Rural communities, and therefore their transportation systems, depend heavily on federal transportation dollars to make necessary improvements to keep goods moving and grow the economy. The current uncertainty with the Highway Trust Fund adds to rural transportation concerns.

"The safety and quality of life in America's small communities and rural areas and the health of the nation's economy ride on our rural transportation system. This backbone of the heartland allows mobility and connectivity for millions of rural Americans. The nation's rural roads provide crucial links from farm to market, move manufactured and energy products, and provide access to countless tourist and recreational destinations," said TRIP Executive Director Will Wilkins in a statement. "But, with long-term federal transportation legislation stuck in political gridlock in Washington, America's rural communities and economies could face even higher unemployment and decline. Funding the modernization of our rural transportation system will create jobs and help ensure long-term economic development and quality of life in rural America."

TRIP's Rural Roads report is available [here](#).