

## FLEET MANAGEMENT

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### Report: Rural Roads Suffering From Poor Conditions, High Fatality Rates

A new report finds that the nation's rural transportation system is in need of modernization to address deficient roads and bridges, due in part to increased truck traffic, and suffers from high crash rates and inadequate capacity.

"Rural Connections: Challenges and Opportunities in America's Heartland," was released Thursday by The Road Information Program, a national non-profit transportation research and pro-road building lobby group based in Washington, D.C.

The TRIP report finds that traffic crashes and fatalities on rural roads are disproportionately high, occurring at a rate nearly three times higher than all other roads. In 2012, the most recent year figures are available, non-Interstate rural roads had a traffic fatality rate of 2.21 deaths for every 100 million vehicle miles of travel, compared to a fatality rate on all other roads of 0.78 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles of travel. Rural traffic fatality rates remain stubbornly high, despite a substantial decrease in the number of overall fatalities, according to TRIP.

TRIP defines rural America as counties that lack an urban area of

at least 50,000 in population or lack a large commuting flow to an urban county.

In addition to disproportionately high traffic fatality rates, the roads and bridges in rural America have significant deficiencies. In 2012, 15% of the nation's major rural roads were rated in poor condition and another 40% were rated in mediocre or fair condition. In 2013, 12% of the nation's rural bridges were rated as structurally deficient and 10% were functionally obsolete.

Connecticut had the highest percentage of rural roads in poor condition, 35%, followed by Rhode Island and West Virginia, each at 33% and Hawaii and Michigan, each at 32%

Pennsylvania and Rhode Island have the highest percentage of deficient bridges at 25%, followed by Iowa at 22%, South Dakota at 21% and Oklahoma at 20%.

When it comes to the fatality rate on rural roads, South Carolina is the highest at 3.99 per 100 million vehicle miles travelled, followed by Florida at 3.55, West Virginia at 2.8, Texas at 2.76 and Arkansas at 2.71. All of these fatality rates are more than twice as high to

more than five times each state's fatality rate for all other roads.

The report also finds that the development of major new oil and gas fields in numerous areas, as well as increased agricultural production, are placing significantly increased traffic loads by large trucks on non-Interstate rural roads, which often have not been constructed to carry such high load volumes. The average travel per-lane mile by large trucks on major, non-arterial rural roads in the U.S. has increased by 16% from 2000 to 2012.

The report comes as Congress is working to address the problem of the federal Highway Trust Fund, which is used to pay for road and bridge projects, is expected to see its balance drop below \$1 billion this summer, which will trigger delays in the federal reimbursement to states for road, highway and bridge projects, and will likely result in states delaying numerous projects.

Also, lawmakers face a September 30 deadline of renewing the nation's highway funding authorization. Without an extension, funding for most federal surface transportation projects will be cut off.