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New Report Shows Rural Infrastructure Needs Major Improvements

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The national non-profit transportation research group TRIP released a new report today that shows the U.S. rural transportation system needs vast improvements. Seanica Otterby has the story.

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- Otterby: Roads, highways, rails and bridges in America's Heartland face a number of significant challenges. AFBF transportation specialist Veronica Nigh says they lack adequate capacity, fail to provide needed levels of connectivity to many communities and are inadequate to accommodate growing freight travel.
- Nigh: According to the report, in 2013, 15 percent of the nation's major rural roads were rated in poor condition and another 39 percent were rated in mediocre or fair condition. In 2014, 11 percent of the nation's rural bridges were rated as structurally deficient and 10 percent were functionally obsolete.
- Otterby: Nigh says rural communities include more than 72 percent of U.S. land and are home to approximately 61 million people. She says transportation is essential in these communities for many reasons, including economic growth and stability.
- Nigh: Rural transportation is really a three-legged stool relying on water, rail and roads. Without any of the three of those, our rural communities can't thrive in the way that they really should. Those different segments of the transportation system that U.S. agriculture relies on is necessary to ensure our future success.
- Otterby: To facilitate the necessary improvements, Nigh says solutions at the county, state and federal level must be empowered and barriers in the permitting process must be reduced.
- Nigh: The federal government is a critical source of funding for rural roads, highways and bridges. However, current federal transportation funding expires on May 31, 2015. We need to come up with a long-term solution to provide adequate funding, and timely funding, to improve rural roads, highways and bridges.
- Otterby: Seanica Otterby, Washington.