State report: Not enough funding for road, bridge repairs

New MDOT online portal shows conditions of local bridges

By JOHN MATUSZAK - HP Staff Writer

The Michigan Department of Transportation has released a dashboard that shows the condition of bridges across the state, including local bridges.

The dashboard lists 4,447 bridges maintained by MDOT, along with 6,645 local bridges. Of the state bridges, 28 percent are listed in good condition, 66 percent are in fair condition and 5.5 percent were in poor condition, according to inspections conducted in 2018.

The website showed 102 local bridges in Berrien County. Of those, 49 were in good condition, 39 were fair and 14 were in poor condition.

Of Van Buren County's 66 local bridges, 30 were good, 32 fair, and four poor. Cass County had 30 bridges listed, with eight in good condition, 12 fair and 10 poor.

According to an MDOT news release, beginning in January, the highway department worked to improve its existing bridge dashboard by including all bridges, not just those on the National Highway System. The new site is also directly connected to a bridge database so that the dashboard reflects the most current available data, instead of only being a snapshot in time.

Federal law defines a bridge as a structure carrying traffic with a span greater than 20 feet. The law also requires that all bridges be inspected at least every two years.

A report released by TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based transportation consulting organization, found that 11 percent of Michigan bridges were structurally deficient in 2017, meaning at least one of the major elements of the bridge was in poor condition or worse. That compares to 9 percent of bridges in poor condition nationwide.

Many transportation projects remain unfunded. Projects listed as unfunded in Berrien County include work on M-139, M-63, I-94 and U.S. 12; in Cass County on M-62 and M-60; and in Van Buren County on I-196, I-94 and M-140.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has proposed a 45-cent-per-gallon increase on Michigan's gas tax by Oct. 1, 2020, which would raise more than $2 billion annually to fix Michigan's roads and bridges.

TRIP estimates the bad roads are costing Michigan drivers $4.6 billion a year - $646 per driver. The total cost to motorists for driving on Michigan roads in poor conditions is about $14.1 billion each year when considering additional factors such as insurance, lost time and poor road design.

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