Rural roads in bad shape
Report says about a fifth of state’s rural roadways listed in worst classification

By DAVID BROOKS, Monitor staff

Hampshire’s rural pavement is rated as being in the worst category. That percentage is worse than the national average of 15% and also worse than in Massachusetts (16%) or Vermont (17%), although it’s slightly better than Maine’s figure of 22%. New Hampshire has the 10th highest percentage of poor rural roads of any state, according to the report.

The report, titled “Rural Connections,” argues that the system of federal funding for rural roads and bridges needs to be changed because of their importance as the main, or even sole, link to many disparate communities.

New Hampshire’s rural bridges are in relatively better shape compared to other states, even though 9% of them were judged to be in poor condition or structurally deficient. That percentage is the same as the national rate and much better than some states such as Rhode Island, where a full 23% of bridges were in the worst categories.

The report says 50% of the state’s rural bridges are in good condition. The report uses the Census Bureau definition of rural areas as anywhere outside a community of 2,500 people or more. That covers virtually all of New Hampshire, which isn’t unusual: By this definition, 97 percent of America’s land area is rural.

By contrast, this rural area holds just 19 percent of the nation’s population, the report said. That is a significant number – approximately 60 million people – but the population is spread out over a vast area, making it more difficult to keep them connected and to collect revenue to pay for their infrastructure.

The report’s recommendations include building more roads, including building “30,000 lane miles of limited access highways, largely along existing corridors ... to address the nation’s need for increased rural connectivity.” It also said it would be helpful to “improve public transit service in rural America to provide improved mobility for people without access to private vehicles.”

A key, the report says, is to “adequately fund local and state transportation programs to ensure sufficient preservation of rural roads, highways and bridges to maintain transportation service and accommodate large truck travel.” Most of this money is given to states, which in turn give it to localities, and most comes from federal gasoline taxes. Those taxes have been stagnant for years due mostly to improving gasoline mileage.


(David Brooks can be reached at 369-3313 or dbrooks@cmonitor.com or on Twitter @GraniteGeek.)

From “RURAL CONNECTIONS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN AMERICA’S HEARTLAND” by TRIP, a non-profit that studies surface transportation issues in the U.S. Courtesy—TRIP

Rural roads in New Hampshire, which means roads in most of the state, are in worse shape than roads in similar areas elsewhere in the county, with one in five of them judged to be “in poor condition.” That’s the conclusion of a report by TRIP, a non-profit that studies surface transportation issues. The report says Federal Highway Administration data shows that 21% of New Hampshire’s rural pavement is rated as being in the worst category. That percentage is worse than the national average of 15% and also worse than in Massachusetts (16%) or Vermont (17%), although it’s slightly better than Maine’s figure of 22%. New Hampshire has the 10th highest percentage of poor rural roads of any state, according to the report.

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