



Our view: Pa. roads need lasting fix

By the Editorial Board

Something as elemental as deploying tax dollars to maintain the roads and bridges that make our lives and livelihoods possible should be an urgent, universal priority, even in a state as geographically diverse as Pennsylvania.

As Doug Hill, executive director of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, noted, without a sound transportation system “we cannot get children to school, citizens to work or goods to market.”

And yet in Pennsylvania, transportation funding — the most basic of government functions — is perpetually fraught.

Reporter Valerie Myers on Monday detailed the latest frustrating reminder — a national report ranking the state’s rural roads and bridges among the worst in the country.

The analysis from T.R.I.P., a national transportation research group, said 21 percent of Pennsylvania’s rural roads are in poor condition and 18 percent of rural bridges are poor or structurally deficient, which places the state fourth in the nation for having the most failing bridges.

At the same time that improvements are so badly needed, the state is instead diverting money meant for rural road repairs to cover the costs of emergency repairs caused by weather, like flooding and landslides, as Myers detailed. Earlier this year, \$200 million worth of improvements were expected on rural roads. Now the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation is eyeing a more modest \$24.2 million worth of work, while costly repairs for historic flooding that occurred in 2018 continue.

That’s bad enough. Worse, it is only one of many shell games played with transit funds. State Auditor General Eugene DePasquale in April released an audit showing that since the fiscal year 2012-13, \$4.25 billion raised through the state’s steep gas tax and meant to repair roads and bridges has been diverted to subsidize the state police. That esteemed and vital organization’s costs are growing, in part, because more communities are shirking the costs of local police coverage and relying solely on services that come from the state police at no additional expense.

Also part of the state’s transit troubles are litigation over the use of Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission funds to support mass transit, and uncertainty surrounding the federal Highway Trust Fund, which is going broke.

State Sen. Dan Laughlin, of Millcreek Township, R-49th Dist., at a recent event hosted by the Manufacturer & Business Association noted there is no easy solution to funding both infrastructure improvements and the state police. Mercer County Sen. Michele Brooks, R-50th Dist., said “nothing being discussed is friendly to rural Pennsylvanians.”

What is needed is political courage. This policy debacle is too important to the state’s prospects to duck. Asking prosperous, populous municipalities that are leaning on free state police coverage to chip in is one reasonable place to start.