

Report finds many NY bridges are in need of repair

By [Cayla Harris](#) | Wednesday, September 18, 2019



Photo: Paul Buckowski

ALBANY – Nearly one in 10 bridges in the Capital Region are in poor condition, according to a new report from a national transportation research group.

The report, released Wednesday by the D.C.-based nonprofit TRIP, identifies nearly 70 bridges in the Capital Region in poor or structurally deficient condition. While a handful of bridges ranked the worst are closed or temporarily blocked off, other poorly rated bridges still service more than 350,000 drivers each day.

Among the worst ranked and most traveled: Albany’s Interstate 90 bridge crossing Broadway and an Interstate 87 bridge that crosses a rail line about 2.5 miles north of Ravena.

The region would need millions of dollars to rehabilitate or replace the bridges, many of which are aging and growing weaker by the day, transportation officials said. And the older a bridge gets, the more costly it is to fix.

“It’s an opportunity for New York state and for businesses and industries to use this ... as a roadmap to find a way to make sure that our roads and bridges represent what it is to be the Empire State: the hub of commerce and industry,” Johnny Evers, the director of government affairs for the Business Council of New York, said at a press conference at the Capitol on Wednesday.

The report evaluates bridges 20 feet or longer and includes Albany, Rensselaer and Saratoga counties. The bridges are rated on a scale from zero to nine – nine being the best possible rating – and those ranked four or below are considered poor or worse.

An accompanying assessment also examines the health of bridges statewide, where 10 percent of all bridges are in poor condition – the 12th-highest in the United States. Many

structures have either approached or surpassed 50 years old – the typical design life for a bridge, according to the report.

Researchers and transportation officials do not pin deteriorating conditions on local governments – instead, they say, a lack of funding hinders local officials from revamping bridges in need of repair.

Carolyn Bonifas Kelly, an associate director for TRIP and the report’s author, said local officials are “doing a tremendous job with the funds they have available,” but a statewide transportation funding shortfall prevents major renovation.

The federal government also neglects transportation infrastructure while configuring budgets, she said, urging Congress to renew public funds for long-term transportation projects when the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act expires next year.

“Unless New York can increase transportation funding at the local, state and federal levels, bridge conditions will continue to deteriorate, and the future cost of repairing these bridges could grow even higher,” she said.

The Federal Highway Administration estimates that the state would need \$3.6 billion to replace or fix bridges with a “poor” or worse rating. State Sen. Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, who chairs the Committee on Transportation, promised to push for additional funding to upgrade local infrastructure.

“Now, more than ever, we need to ensure that we’re dedicating resources to local infrastructure that is desperately in need of repair and maintenance,” Kennedy said in a release. “Taxpayer dollars must be put to work to improve our local community.”

Mark Eagan, the president and CEO of the Capital Region Chamber, added that local elected officials should make transportation funding a “top priority,” warning that continued deterioration would hurt the local economy.

In the meantime, local governments are imposing height and weight restrictions or closing lanes on deteriorating bridges.

That could translate to costly and timely detours for a slew of drivers, including those transporting cargo or large groups of people. In more serious cases, decaying bridges could cause damage to vehicles or fatal accidents, officials said.

“Without increased and reliable transportation funding, numerous projects to improve and preserve aging bridges in the Capital Region and statewide will not move forward, hampering New York’s ability to efficiently and safely move people and goods,” Will Wilkins, the executive director of TRIP, said in the release.