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Study finds 1 of every 13 bridges in the area is deficient



The North Adam Street Bridge is one of Buffalo Niagara's many deficient bridges. It is currently closed. (Image via Google Earth)

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A report released Monday rated 91 of the Buffalo Niagara region's 1,164 bridges — about 8 percent — as deficient.

Ten bridges — built from 1918 to 1960 and located in the Southtowns, Lancaster, Buffalo, Lockport and Akron — topped the list of the most deficient, according to TRIP, a Washington-based national transportation research group.

Elected officials, transportation experts and labor leaders attended a press conference coordinated by the Buffalo Niagara Partnership, and they focused on what they called a growing disparity in state funding for infrastructure repair. The disparity has resulted in deteriorating conditions that jeopardize the safety of motorists, they said.

"Western New York has a concentration of bridges, and a lot of these are aging out," said Carley Hill, a local contractor and chairwoman of the FAIR Committee of WNY (Fair Apportionment of Infrastructure Revenues). "Every year it gets put off it increases the cost of repair."

One of the Lancaster spans listed in the report, the Stony Road Bridge that crosses Ellicott Creek, was already rebuilt at the end of 2018, said William Geary, commissioner of the Erie County Department of Public Works.

The federal government covered 80 percent of the \$2.3 million cost to rebuild the 1955 bridge. Erie County government covered the rest, Geary said.

"It's a brand-new bridge altogether," he said. "We ripped it down and rebuilt it. Most people do not realize how expensive bridges are. The steel we use for bridges must be U.S.-made, and that translates into a six-month lead time.

"Bethlehem Steel isn't here anymore, so we must get girders from Ohio or Michigan. Twenty-three of the 290 bridges that the county is responsible for must be totally replaced," Geary said.

The county also completed a \$500,000 project on the Mill Street Bridge, one of two spans in West Seneca that were listed. Both the Mill Road and the Leydecker Road bridges cross Cazenovia Creek, connecting town roads.

"But the county owns the bridges," Geary said. "We submitted submitted funding applications to the state in 2017, but they did not get selected. We replaced the wingwall to divert the water away from the base of the bridge."

The Leydecker Road Bridge project will cost \$2 million and must be rebuilt, Geary said.

The cited bridges in the Southtowns are on Route 75 in Hamburg, Route 62 in North Collins and Trevitt Road in Boston.

The two most deficient bridges on the list — the State Street Bridge in Akron built in 1938 over Murder Creek and the North Adam Street Bridge in Lockport built in 1918 over the Erie Canal — are both closed.

Forty-five percent (525 of 1,164) of locally and state-maintained bridges in Buffalo-Niagara have been rated in fair condition. A fair rating indicates that a bridge's structural elements are sound, but minor deterioration has occurred to the bridge's deck, substructure or superstructure. The remaining 47 percent (548 of 1,164) of the area's bridges are rated in good condition, according to TRIP spokesman Rocky Moretti.

"The lifespan of a bridge constructed before 1970 is 50 years if they are well-maintained," Geary said. "At that point they should be restructured."