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Report: Area bridges in better shape than state average

By Bob Clark | Special to the Press



The Main Street bridge in Salamanca is one of 27 bridges in Cattaraugus County to be classified as in poor condition, according to the state Department of Transportation. Just over 5% of the county's 480 bridges share the classification, below the 10% reported statewide.

Press photo by Kellen M. Quigley

Cattaraugus and Allegany county bridges are in better shape than the state average, according to the state Department of Transportation and research by a D.C. nonprofit.

Statewide, 10% — 1,757 of 17,521 — of bridges are rated poor/structurally deficient, according to a report on bridge conditions released by Washington-based nonprofit Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives. Meanwhile, 53% of state bridges are rated in fair condition and the remaining 37% is in good condition.

According to the Federal Highway Administration's National Bridge Inventory, 47,054 bridges of more than 616,000 nationwide are in poor condition, or 7.64 percent. New York ranks 13th in number of open bridges nationwide and seventh in number of poor bridges. Iowa, with almost one in five of all bridges in poor condition, ranks first with 4,675 poor bridges.

According to the state DOT, poor condition bridges show structural deficiencies. However, the fact that a bridge is in poor condition does not imply that it is unsafe but typically requires placing weight limits on the structure, repairs and potentially replacement. Fair indicates that the structure is sound, but minor deterioration has been found on the deck, substructure or superstructure.

Data for the report came from federal data, which was compiled following routine reviews of bridges by the state DOT.

According to the latest data available from the DOT online, 27 of 480 bridges in Cattaraugus County were rated as poor, or 5.63%. The vast majority of bridges in the county are owned by the state through the DOT or Allegany State Park Authority; or by the county. Only a handful are owned at the municipal level.

The oldest poor condition bridge is the Baxter Mill Road bridge over Ischua Creek in the town of Ischua. The bridge was constructed in 1893. The oldest still-serving bridge in the county, however, is in better condition. The Farwell Road bridge over Ischua Creek was built in 1891. The newest bridge to be marked in poor condition is the Main Street bridge over the Allegheny River in Salamanca, rebuilt in 1990. An October 2017 inspection classified the bridge as in poor condition.

“On behalf of our more than 900 town highway superintendents we’d like to thank TRIP for its excellent work highlighting the need for increased funding to stabilize the condition of our state and local bridges,” said town of Denmark highway superintendent Patrick Mahar, president of the New York State Association of Town Superintendents of Highways. “We commend Governor Cuomo and our state legislators for investing over \$450 million in local bridges through the Bridge-NY program. But significant increases are needed in this and other local infrastructure programs to ensure New Yorkers don’t have to continue to drive over deficient bridges.”

“Maintaining safe and stable infrastructure is critically important to all New Yorkers. Every day, millions of people travel through our state on what are often poor and structurally deficient roads and bridges,” said state Sen. Tim Kennedy, chairman of the Senate Committee on Transportation. “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. Taxpayer dollars must be put to work to improve our local community. I will continue to work with local stakeholders and continue to fight for additional funding to improve our roads and bridges.”

Cattaraugus County Department of Public Works Commissioner Kathleen Ellis could not be reached for comment.