

OBSERVER-DISPATCH

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Area bridges under the scope



A bridge that carries Leland Avenue over the Mohawk River in North Utica was built in 1980. According to DOT data, that same bridge is described as being in poor status. It was last inspected Nov. 28, 2018. [JOLENE CLEAVER / OBSERVER DISPATCH]

By [Jolene Cleaver](#)

Sometimes more than one report or dataset should be examined for the purposes of getting a full picture of an issue, comments from bridge data-gathering entities suggest.

In a recently released report by TRIP — a Washington, D.C. based national transportation research nonprofit — 11 percent of bridges in the Utica area are in lackluster condition.

While a comparable percentage figure of poor-rated Oneida County bridges was not immediately available from the state Department of Transportation, officials were able to provide another angle to the bridge examination process.

Part of that process made news headlines this month as a Higginsville Road bridge in Verona had to be manually taken down due to fear of imminent collapse.

"We inspect bridges every two years. If there's an issue with a bridge it gets a flag," said James Piccola, a regional spokesperson for the DOT. If there are immediate safety concerns, the bridge closes automatically, he said.

"... Federal ratings are used to identify bridges that are considered "Poor" ... The fact that a bridge is in poor condition does not imply that it is unsafe or likely to collapse. A poor bridge, when left open to traffic, typically requires posting for weight limits, significant maintenance and repair to remain in service and eventual rehabilitation or replacement to address deficiencies. ... about 10.5 percent of the highway bridges in New York State are classified as poor," according to information on the DOT website referred to by DOT spokeswoman Jennifer Post.

The DOT posts their most current bridge inspection data on their website.

Why another report?

The focus of the TRIP report is to highlight the information for public and policymakers, but there is a lag time between when some of the data is collected and the report disseminated, said Carolyn Kelly, associate director of research and communication for TRIP.

Reports such as those from TRIP sometimes make the content more digestible, Kelly suggested.

"This is the first time we have done a bridge-specific report. ... We've done highway studies before," she said.

Among the TRIP report highlights:

- **11 percent** of bridges in the Utica area in lackluster condition
- **49 percent** (241 of 487) of locally and state-maintained bridges in the Utica area 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 **39 percent** (192 of 487) of the area's bridges are rated in good condition," reads a statement.

Kelly confirmed that for the purposes of their report, they defined "Utica area" as all of Oneida County, and data from the TRIP report accessed information from the 2018 FHWA report, which the state DOT submits to every year.

However, "some (bridges) were replaced or repaired in the meantime," Kelly said, discussing the timeframe between data collection and report release.

Among bridges that the TRIP report and DOT data jointly can paint a picture of include:

- The TRIP report notes the Higginsville Road bridge was in imminent danger of collapse. That bridge was featured in a report section as "... poor/structurally deficient bridges with highest average daily traffic." TRIP says the bridge was built in 1908 and was one lane.

In DOT information, the bridge carried Higginsville Road across a portion of the state canal system. It was marked as poor status at the last inspection on Nov. 6, 2018.

The bridge had been closed since 2008 and a DOT spokesperson said the bridge structure "experienced a shift" during the demolition process, prompting crews to close that part of the canal to boaters until further notice, according to O-D archives.

The demolition was part of a \$4.9 million bridge replacement project scheduled for completion by the end of 2020.

- The TRIP report notes a Utica bridge that carries Leland Avenue over the Mohawk River. The two-lane bridge was built in 1980, is open and has an average daily traffic of 4,465. According to DOT data, that same bridge is described as being in poor status. It was last inspected Nov. 28, 2018.

What didn't make the TRIP list was an entry found on the NYSDOT bridge log, and perhaps the oldest for Oneida County ... a bridge dating to 1893 carrying Albany Street over Starch Factory Creek in Utica.

It is not listed in poor status.

Contact reporter Jolene Cleaver at 315-792-4956 or follow her on Twitter ([@OD_Cleaver](#)).

AT A GLANCE

Top five Utica area (Oneida County) bridges with poor/structurally ratings with highest average daily traffic:

Municipality;roadway carried;bridge crosses;year built;average daily traffic;Open, Closed or Posted

- Westmoreland, Route I-90. Crosses NYO&W RR and built in 1954
- New Hartford, Route 8. Crosses Route 921E and built in 1967
- Whitesboro, Route I-90. Crosses Route 69 and built in 1954
- Utica, Route 8. Crosses Route 5 and built in 1960
- Verona, Route 365. Crosses Route I-90 and built in 1954

Source: www.Tripnet.org

MORE ONLINE

- To view the TRIP report, visit: https://tripnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/NY_Statewide_Preserving_New_York_Bridges_Report_September_2019.pdf

- To see bridge data maintained by the New York State Department of Transportation, visit: <https://www.dot.ny.gov/main/bridgedata/>