

Report: State's rural bridges in rough shape



by: [Robert Suhr](#)

North Dakota is home to more than 3,500 rural bridges, and many of them are in big trouble.

“11% of the state’s rural bridges are structurally deficient. These are bridges where the engineers see and immediate need for significant repairs. North Dakota ranks 10th nationally in the share of its bridges that are structurally deficient,” said Rocky Moretti of TRIP, a national transportation research group.

He adds last year North Dakota ranked 12th in the country, [so](#)

[things are getting worse.](#)

Burleigh County has plans to replace two rural bridges this year near Baldwin on 26th Street NE and 197th St NE. They are in rough condition with exposed rebar, rotting supports and crumbling concrete.

A perfect example of the state of rural bridges in North Dakota is the Sims bridge, just outside of Almont. It was built all the way back in 1916, making it 104 years old and while this bridge is expected to be replaced later this year, others across Morton County that are nearly as old won’t be, and the reason is that the North Dakota Department of Transportation and the county are at odds with each other.

Morton County alone has over 200 rural bridges that they keep watch over. We sat down with County Engineer John Saiki who says replacing a bridge that might see five cars a day can cost upwards of a million dollars. It’s money they don’t have and can’t always get from the NDDOT.

“We’ll look to the DOT for assistance through federal aid, through state aid, and we have a number that we would like to replace, and at this point in time they look at it and they say there’s an alternative maybe a mile away or two miles away that is a better condition bridge that everyone should be using it if they have a heavier load,” said Saiki.

But he adds that can add dozens of extra miles for farmers and wear those bridges out faster.

One Morton County bridge not slated for replacement is the Youngtown bridge North of New Salem, built in 1922. It’s got a weight limit of just 5 tons or 10,000 pounds.

And if that doesn’t raise you eyebrow, maybe this will. We came across this bridge on 33rd street not far away. It had a weight limit of 12 tons, but someone didn’t listen. Now it’s closed and its fate is unknown.

It’s a frightening example of how fragile the state’s rural infrastructure is and how this problem needs to be addressed before it’s too late.

The report also shows 4 percent of North Dakota’s rural roads are in poor condition, with 12 percent in mediocre condition.