

Coatings Industry News

Decreased Funds Expected for Rural Infrastructure

Last week, national transportation research nonprofit TRIP (Washington, D.C.) released a report evaluating the safety and condition of rural roads and bridges in the United States in relation to the nation's current backlog and estimated decreases in funding to be experienced from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report—Rural Connections: Challenges and Opportunities in America's Heartland—contains data for all 50 states, breaking down the percentage of rural roads in poor condition, the percent of deficient rural bridges, rural traffic fatality rates and the number of rural traffic fatalities.

Rural Connections

In analyzing the Status of the Nation's Highways, Bridges and Transit, 23rd Edition (submitted by the U.S. Department of Transportation to Congress in 2019), TRIP found that the nation's rural transportation system faces a [\\$211 billion backlog](#) in needed repairs and improvements.

In addition, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials estimates that amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, states and local governments will also experience a loss of \$50 billion—roughly 30%—in revenue from decreased travel over the course of the next 18 months.



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"TRIP's report provides further evidence all Americans need safe and efficient transportation infrastructure facilities and also reveals we are falling further behind in addressing conditions on our rural roads," said American Road and Transportation Builders Association President Dave Bauer.

"It is time to stop talking and start delivering the long-term increase in federal highway and bridge investment necessary to jumpstart the economy post-coronavirus."

[Last month](#), an analysis report issued by the American Road and Transportation Builders Association regarding the USDOT 2019 National Bridge Inventory found that more than 46,000 bridges in the U.S. have been classified as structurally deficient and in poor condition.

While this number has declined by almost 1,000—0.1% lower—since ARTBA reported on the inventory last year, the association notes that at this rate, it would take over 50 years to repair all the structures.

Looking strictly at rural infrastructure, TRIP reports that on average, 8% of the nation's rural bridges are structurally deficient and in poor condition. Like ARTBA's report, TRIP also ranked the state's based on their number of structurally deficient bridges, poor rural pavements, in addition to comparing fatality rates per 100 million vehicle miles traveled on rural non-interstate roads and other roads, among others.

The top 10 states in terms of most structurally deficient rural bridges include:

- **Rhode Island (22%);**
- **West Virginia (21%);**
- **Iowa (20%);**
- **South Dakota (18%);**
- **Pennsylvania (17%);**
- **Louisiana (15%);**
- **Maine (13%);**
- **New York (12%);**
- **Michigan (12%); and**
- **North Dakota (11%)**

In percentages of states with rural pavements in poor condition, Rhode Island also took top spot with 41%, with Oklahoma (36%), Hawaii (32%), West Virginia (29%) and New Mexico (28%) making up the rest of the top five.

The report also notes that rural, non-Interstate roads have a traffic fatality rate that is more than double than on all other roads. In 2018, non-Interstate rural roads had a traffic fatality rate of two deaths for every 100 million VMT, compared to a fatality rate of 0.88 deaths per 100 million VMT on all other roads.

These numbers accounted for 22% of all VMT in the U.S. in 2018. However, crashes on the nation's rural, non-Interstate routes resulted in 40% (14,455 of 36,560) of the nation's traffic fatalities in 2018.

Top states for this portion of the report include South Carolina—which had more than three times the number of accidents on rural roads than it did on all other roads—Oregon, Kentucky, Tennessee and Arizona.

"This report reinforces what many rural Americans already know – our country's rural infrastructure is crumbling. The competitiveness of our farmers and ranchers relies on an aging network of roads, bridges, waterways, and railways that need an immediate infusion of investment dollars," said [Todd Van Hoose, President and CEO of the Farm Credit Council](#).

"That's why we have partnered with more than 250 national, state, and local organizations through the Rebuild Rural Coalition. Previous funding opportunities have overlooked our rural infrastructure in the past. We must invest in the transportation network that drives the base of our economy. We must invest in all aspects of rural infrastructure. And we must do it before we lose our competitive advantage."

In analyzing the report's findings, TRIP suggests that the nation's annual \$28 billion investment by all levels of government in rural road, highway and bridge rehabilitation and enhancements be increased by 28%, to approximately \$36 billion annually, to improve their condition, reliability and safety.

In addition, TRIP also suggests the need for adequate funding for the federal surface transportation program, pointing out that the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act expires Sept. 30 of the year.

"The economic recovery from the pandemic could be hastened by significant investments in our nation's transportation system to support job creation while making needed improvements to our roads and bridges that will serve our economy and enhance quality of life for all Americans for decades to come," said [Dave Kearby, Executive Director of TRIP](#).

View the full report, [here](#).