

Report: Rural Roads Face \$211 Billion Backlog in Repairs and Improvements

According to the research, the poor condition of rural roads not only causes more accidents but can negatively affect local economies and efforts to bounce back from the coronavirus-caused economic slump, leaving farmers and others at a disadvantage.

By [Liz Carey](#) | May 18, 2020



Read the [full report](#) (photo source: "Rural Connections: Challenges and Opportunities in America's Heartland" report)

A new report from transportation non-profit TRIP shows that America's rural transportation faces a \$211 billion backlog in repairs that contributes to high fatality rates.

At the same time, states transportation revenues are anticipated to see a \$50 billion decrease in revenues leaving experts to question whether rural roads will see any improvements at all in the coming year

According to the report, 13% of America's rural roads are rated in poor condition, while another 21% are listed as being in mediocre condition. The report also found that eight percent of the nation's rural bridges are in a poor or structurally deficient condition, and that another 47% were only in fair condition, meaning they were structurally sound but had minor deterioration in the bridge's deck, substructure or superstructure.

The report ranked Rhode Island as the state with the largest percentage of rural roads in poor conditions and the most rural bridges in poor condition. Oklahoma, Hawaii, West Virginia and New Mexico rounded out the top five states with the most rural roads in poor condition, while West Virginia, Iowa, South Dakota, and Pennsylvania rounded out the top five states with the largest percentage of rural bridges in poor condition.

"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. "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."

The report, [Rural Connections: Challenges and Opportunities in America's Heartland](#), found that these conditions contribute to higher than average fatality rates.

Traffic crashes and fatalities on rural non-Interstate roads are more than double what they are on all other roads, the report said. In 2018,

non-interstate rural roads had a traffic fatality rate of 2 deaths for every 100 million vehicle miles traveled, compared to 0.88 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles travel on all other roads. Narrow lanes, limited shoulders, sharp curves, pavement drop-offs, steep slopes, and limited clear zones alongside roadways were causes for the high fatality rate, according to the report.

The report ranked South Carolina as the worst state for fatalities on rural roads with more than three times the number of accidents on its rural roads than on all its other roads.

The state had 3.44 traffic fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled on rural roads compared to 1.12 vehicle miles traveled on all other roads.

Additionally, the report found that sixty-six U.S. cities with a population of 50,000 or more do not have direct access to the Interstate Highway System. The lack of access can dampen economic development as well as isolate those in rural areas from needed supplies and services. Rural residents often have to travel long distances to access education, employment, retail locations and health services. The lack of access also puts them at greater risk when it comes to accessing emergency response services like police, fire and medical assistance. Without addressing the problem, rural road conditions could impact the country's supply chain, officials said.

"Farmers and ranchers depend on rural roads, highways, and bridges to move their products to market. So does the integrity of our food supply chain," said Zippy Duvall, president of the American Farm Bureau Federation. "Unfortunately, due primarily to lack of investment over several decades, America's infrastructure is in a dire state of rapid deterioration, and recent events show even more the importance of guaranteeing food arrives where it needs to be."

But fixing the roads won't be easy.

The report found that more than \$211 billion is needed to repair roads and improve traffic safety. And states face losing nearly a third of their transportation revenue over the next 18 months because of the decrease in vehicle traffic due to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. Earlier this month, a group of several dozen transportation industry groups wrote a letter to President Donald Trump asking him and his administration to push forward with an investment in infrastructure. And in April, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) requested that Congress provide state departments of transportation with \$50 billion to replace their lost revenues, on top of the money provided to DOTs in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed in late March. Officials with [TRIP](#) said it's imperative that Congress invest in infrastructure to help rural communities, as well as to help the country recover more quickly in the wake of the Covid-19's impact on the country's economy.

"The health of the nation's economy and the safety and quality of life in America's small communities and rural areas ride on our rural transportation system," said Dave Kearby, executive director of TRIP. "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 road and bridges that will serve our economy and enhance quality of life for all Americans for decades to come."