

POLITICO

By [RYAN MCCRIMMON](#) | 05/13/2020

QUICK FIX

— **There's a \$211 billion backlog to repair crumbling rural roads and bridges**, and states facing an epic budget crunch because of the pandemic could be ill equipped to fix infrastructure problems, according to new research.

DRIVING THE DAY

DEMOCRATS ROLL OUT FARM RESCUE WISH LIST: The House on Friday is expected to vote on a [\\$3 trillion stimulus package](#), dubbed the [HEROES Act](#), backed by Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#). That's likely the end of the line for the legislation, considering Senate Republicans aren't on board, but it gives Democrats fresh ammunition in negotiations over the next coronavirus response measure.

RURAL ROADS IN NEED OF REPAIR: Fixing outdated infrastructure isn't top of mind for most policymakers at the moment. But the issue remains a huge headache for U.S. agriculture, and it could be made worse by the coronavirus pandemic.

[Research published Tuesday by TRIP](#), a nonprofit transportation research group, found that a combined 34 percent of rural roads are in "poor" or "mediocre" condition. That's especially problematic for heavy vehicles, like farm machinery or trucks carrying ag products. Meanwhile, the rates of car crashes and fatalities on rural roads (not including interstates) are more than twice as high as all other roads.

Supply chains in the spotlight: The report touts the rural transportation network as "the first and last link in the supply chain from farm to market," a system that's facing massive disruptions right now. At the same time, the current lack of traffic offers governments a rare opportunity to repair roads and other infrastructure, said Stephen E. Sandherr, CEO of the Associated General Contractors of America, [in a statement released with the report](#).

Here's the problem: There's a huge backlog in funding for such repairs, and the pandemic isn't helping. The sharp dropoff in travel is projected to lower state transportation revenue by at least 30 percent, or \$50 billion, over the next 18 months, according to TRIP.

Infrastructure week anyone? Congress has made several half-hearted attempts in recent years to negotiate a bipartisan infrastructure bill, but talks have always fizzled out. Now, House Democrats are proposing to infuse \$875 billion into the coffers of cash-strapped state and local governments, a central — but very controversial — piece of their stimulus plan.