



Funding gaps for rural infrastructure intensified during pandemic



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WASHINGTON—The nation’s roads and bridges are in disrepair—particularly those in rural areas. And as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to cause economic disruptions, financial investment for road maintenance falls farther behind.

According to a report recently published by TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit, the U.S. faces a \$211 billion backlog in needed repairs and improvements to rural roads, highways and bridges.

And that number is expected to grow. Decreased travel resulting from the

pandemic is projected to reduce state transportation revenue by at least 30%—or about \$50 billion—over the next 18 months, stated the TRIP report.

“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](#), in a [news release about the TRIP report](#).

Improving roads and bridges is a critical issue for rural localities as they face unique challenges. Rural roadways lack many safety features such as guardrails and rumble strips, and have higher rates of fatal traffic crashes. In fact, the report found traffic fatalities on rural non-interstate highways occur at a rate more than double that of all other roads.

Additionally, rural roads and bridges cannot sufficiently support increasing freight travel in many areas and lack connections to many communities—ultimately affecting farmers’ competitiveness and economic strength.

“Too often states must reduce the weight allowance on bridges rather than repair them when funds aren’t available,” said Andrew Smith, associate director of governmental relations at Virginia Farm Bureau Federation. “This negatively impacts commerce, especially agriculture in rural areas.”

The TRIP report found 13% of U.S. rural roads are in poor condition, 21% in mediocre condition, and 16% are fair. Eight percent of U.S. bridges are in poor condition or are structurally deficient, and 47% are rated fair. In Virginia, 8% of rural roads have poor pavement conditions, 20% are mediocre and 26% are fair, with the remaining 46% in good condition. Five percent of Virginia bridges are in poor condition or are structurally deficient, and 63% are fair.

“We need to have roads that are in good shape for farmers to not only access markets, but also to plant and harvest,” Smith said. “With the loss of farmland, often a farmer must travel miles to find land to produce crops. We need dependable roads.”

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