

TUESDAY, JULY 21, 2020

Arizona interstate pavement, bridges rated among nation's best

PHOENIX – The conditions of pavement and bridges on Arizona's interstate freeways rank among the nation's best in an annual report by a nonprofit transportation research group.

Washington, D.C.-based TRIP says that while interstate freeways across the country face increasing congestion and need significant investments for expansion and repair, just 2% of Arizona's interstate pavement was in poor condition and 1% of bridges were in poor condition. Arizona ranked well within the upper half of states in terms of interstate pavement listed in poor condition, while only five states had lower percentages of interstate bridges listed in poor condition.

The Arizona Department of Transportation's latest figures show 1.1% of pavement on the state's interstate freeways was considered in poor condition. Meanwhile, 0.9% of bridges ADOT maintains on all state highways were rated in poor condition. A poor rating does not mean a bridge is unsafe; it means repair needs have been identified in the bridge's deck, superstructure or substructure.

"We have worked diligently to maximize the funding Arizonans allocate for transportation to deliver the safest and most reliable highway system possible," said Dallas Hammit, ADOT's state engineer and deputy director for transportation.

Despite Arizona's strong standing in the TRIP report, challenges loom.

As people drive less and stay home more amid the current public health situation, ADOT is evaluating the short- and long-term revenue implications to the Highway User Revenue Fund, a major source of funding for projects and improvements. ADOT is committed to providing a fiscally constrained construction program with prudent financial management in the months and years ahead.

With ADOT responsible for 28,000 lane miles and 6,800 center-line miles of highway, available funding in recent years has meant that a smaller share of pavement on all state highways is considered in good versus fair condition.

Over a nine-year period, the share of pavement considered in good condition has fallen from 72% to 48% on interstate freeways, from 68% to 32% on non-interstate national highway system highways and from 44% to 19% on state highways that aren't part of the national highway system. This drop in pavement condition is expected to worsen with time, if funding levels remain the same, as the deterioration is occurring at exponential rates.

Among the state highway system's 4,800 bridges, the share rated in good condition has fallen from 78% to 59% in recent years.

Arizona's relatively dry and mild climate helps pavement and bridges last longer before major repairs are needed. Bridge and pavement conditions also are inspected on a regular basis. Overall, Arizona's highway system is relatively young, including the freeways and bridges carrying higher volumes of traffic on Phoenix-area freeways. As the pavements and bridges age, the cost and effort of maintaining them increases.