

TRANSPORTATION

Report: Majority of RI's interstate bridges in need of replacement

by: [Alexandra Leslie](#) | July 14, 2020

WASHINGTON (WPRI) — A new report has found the majority of Rhode Island's interstate bridges are in need of repair or replacement.

The [report released Tuesday](#) by [TRIP](#) — a national transportation research nonprofit — highlights the use, condition, and benefits of the country's interstate system. It also shows the findings of a [2019 report](#) prepared by the [Transportation Research Board \(TRB\)](#).

According to the TRB report, the U.S. Interstate system has a persistent and growing backlog of physical and operational deficiencies as a result of age, heavy use, and deferred reinvestment, and is in need of major reconstruction and modernization.

The report also concludes an annual investment in the Interstate Highway System should be increased approximately two-and-a-half times, from \$23 billion in 2018 to \$57 billion annually over the next 20 years.

The report additionally looked into pavement smoothness. It found that while most segments of the interstate are acceptably smooth, that crumbling foundations of most highways need to be reconstructed, and continued resurfacing alone would not be as beneficial as addressing foundation issues.

In Rhode Island, the report concluded 17% of Interstate bridges are rated in poor/structurally deficient conditions, the highest share in the U.S. It also found 89% of Rhode Island's Interstate bridges are in need of repair or replacement. Comparatively, just 2% of Rhode Island's Interstate highways have pavement in poor condition, according to the report.

Ed Mortimer, vice president of transportation infrastructure at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said the report confirms the country's Interstate highway system "is in serious need of modernization."

"Commitment to modernization must be shared by federal, state and local leaders as well as the private sector," Mortimer added. "The Interstate system plays a key national role in economic success and quality of life for every American, and we continue to urge bipartisan solutions to address this critical issue."

The TRIP report found that since 2000, travel on the interstate has increased at a rate nearly triple that at which new lane capacity is being added. According to the report, 67% of urban Interstate highways are considered congested during peak hours in Rhode Island, the seventh greatest share in the U.S.

The report also found the design of Rhode Island's Interstates to be significantly safer to travel on as all other roadways. The fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles of travel on Rhode Island's Interstate in 2018 was 0.54, compared to 0.81 on the state's non-Interstate routes, according to data in the report.

The chart below ranks states whose Interstate systems are the most congested, have experienced the greatest increase in vehicle miles of travel (VMT) since 2000, carry the greatest share of commercial trucks, have the largest share of pavement in poor condition and bridges in poor/structurally deficient condition, and have the highest fatality rate:

RANK	Congested Urban Interstates		2000-18 Interstate VMT Increase		Interstate Travel by Commercial Trucks		Interstate Pavement in Poor Condition		Interstate Bridges Poor/Structurally Deficient		Interstate Fatality Rate	
1	California	86%	Nevada	72%	Arkansas	30%	Hawaii	19%	Rhode Island	17%	Arizona	1.09
2	Maryland	82%	Louisiana	60%	Wyoming	29%	Delaware	11%	West Virginia	14%	Mississippi	1.00
3	New Jersey	78%	North Carolina	54%	Iowa	19%	Wyoming	9%	Illinois	8%	Texas	0.97
4	Delaware	73%	Utah	54%	West Virginia	19%	New Jersey	8%	Massachusetts	6%	Idaho	0.96
5	Florida	70%	Colorado	51%	North Dakota	18%	Louisiana	7%	New York	6%	New Mexico	0.90
6	Massachusetts	70%	Texas	45%	South Dakota	18%	Michigan	7%	Missouri	5%	South Carolina	0.87
7	Rhode Island	67%	North Dakota	45%	Missouri	17%	Washington	6%	Michigan	5%	Montana	0.86
8	Connecticut	64%	Idaho	43%	Mississippi	17%	Colorado	6%	Colorado	5%	Wyoming	0.85
9	Hawaii	62%	Wisconsin	42%	Kansas	17%	California	6%	Connecticut	4%	Kansas	0.79
10	Washington	58%	Mississippi	39%	Montana	17%	Indiana	6%	California	4%	Arkansas	0.79
11	Colorado	57%	Florida	37%	Louisiana	16%	Maryland	5%	Idaho	4%	Oklahoma	0.77
12	Texas	56%	South Carolina	35%	Maine	16%	New York	5%	Pennsylvania	4%	West Virginia	0.74
13	New Hampshire	56%	Montana	34%	Oregon	16%	Wisconsin	4%	Washington	4%	Alabama	0.73
14	Minnesota	56%	Arkansas	33%	Tennessee	16%	Pennsylvania	4%	Maine	4%	Colorado	0.71
15	Georgia	53%	New Jersey	32%	Illinois	16%	Oklahoma	3%	South Carolina	4%	Louisiana	0.69
16	Virginia	53%	Alabama	32%	Nebraska	16%	Arkansas	3%	Montana	4%	Florida	0.69
17	Kentucky	50%	Tennessee	30%	Indiana	15%	Massachusetts	3%	Louisiana	3%	Nebraska	0.67
18	South Carolina	49%	Kentucky	26%	Oklahoma	15%	West Virginia	3%	North Carolina	3%	Georgia	0.64
19	Utah	49%	Iowa	26%	Idaho	15%	Minnesota	3%	New Jersey	3%	Missouri	0.63
20	Ohio	47%	South Dakota	25%	Michigan	15%	Ohio	3%	Wyoming	3%	North Dakota	0.63
	U.S Average	47%	U.S Average	25%	U.S Average	11%	U.S Average	3%	U.S Average	3%	U.S Average	0.58

Source: [TRIP A Transportation Research Nonprofit](#)

The report was done at the request of Congress, as part of the [Fixing America's Surface Transportation \(FAST\) Act](#), on the condition and use of the Interstate system and on actions required to restore and upgrade it.

The current federal surface transportation program — the primary source of Interstate highway funding — expires on Sept. 30, 2020.

The ability of states to invest in Interstate highway repairs and improvements will be hampered by the tremendous decrease in vehicle travel that has occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which the report says is estimated to reduce state transportation revenues by at least 30%, or approximately \$50 billion, over the next 18 months.

Based on the findings of the TRB Interstate report, TRIP recommended several ways to restore the Interstate. This includes the foundational reconstruction of Interstate highways, bridges and interchanges; improvement to roadway safety features; system right-sizing, including upgrading of some roadway corridors to Interstate standards; adding needed additional highway capacity on existing routes; adding additional corridors; and, modifying some urban segments to maintain connectivity while remediating economic and social disruption.

A spokesperson for the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) released the following statement in response to the TRIP report Tuesday.

The TRIP Report on interstate highway bridges and roads states the 89 percent of Rhode Island's interstate bridges are in need of repair or replacement. This percentage would include routine maintenance and minor repairs.

Since 2016. We have 65 interstate bridges. Since 2016, we have replaced 12 and done major rehabilitation on 10. Currently or in the near future we will have replaces nine more and will have major rehabilitation completed on 20 more a part of our bridge program.

The landmark RhodeWorks program which is the framework for all RIDOT's work requires that we address our entire bridge inventory – about 700 across the state. And that is what we have been doing. In the four years that we have operated under RhodeWorks, RIDOT has repaired or replaced 69 bridges statewide. This year, we have 56 construction projects underway that include 180 bridges. Many of these are on our interstates.

Anyone who drives or is a passenger in Rhode Island will tell you that RIDOT has many interstate bridges under repair or replacement – the Southbound Viaduct, Washington Bridge, Tefft Hill, Oxford Street, Plainfield Pike, Roosevelt, I-295 bridges, Greenville Avenue, Farnum Pike, Wood River, and Baker Pines to name a few.

Remember that the decline of our roads and bridges is a 50-year-old problem. It will take more than four years to solve it.

Lisbeth Pettengill

Director of Communications, Rhode Island Department of Transportation

RhodeWorks aims to get the state to meet the federal minimum bridge deficiency standard by 2025 or sooner by repairing more than 150 structurally deficient bridges and repairing another 500 to keep them from falling into advanced states of disrepair, a strategy RIDOT says will save nearly \$950 million.

The program was passed and signed into law on February 11, 2016.