

ATHENS BANNER-HERALD

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Report: 25% of Augusta region's roads in 'poor' condition

By [Damon Cline](#) – Staff Writer

Roughly a quarter of roads in the 13-county Augusta region are in need of repair, according to a Washington, D.C.-based transportation research organization.

A Washington, D.C.-based transportation research firm says a quarter of county-maintained roads in and around Augusta are in "poor" condition, and that one in 10 bridges are "deficient."

But local transportation officials say the report may be skewed by infrastructure in the region's sparsely populated rural counties.

The National Transportation Research Group, a nonprofit that operates as TRIP, reported 25% of county roads in the 13-county Augusta region show signs of deterioration, such as rutting, cracks and potholes. The Nov. 13 report also says 12% of local- and state-maintained bridges in the east central Georgia counties are deteriorated to the point where they are weight-restricted.

TRIP Executive Director Dave Kearby said "a robust and reliable transportation system that is maintained in good condition" is "vital to the quality of life of the Central Savannah River Area's residents, the success and growth of businesses and the positive experience of its visitors."



The new Berckman's road bridge spanning Rae's Creek in Augusta Monday afternoon November 16, 2020. [MICHAEL HOLAHAN/THE AUGUSTA CHRONICLE]

The [report](#), "Moving the Central Savannah River Area Forward: Road and Bridge Conditions, Traffic Safety, Travel Trends and Funding Needs in the Central Savannah River Area," was based on

surveys conducted in late 2019 and early 2020 in the following counties: Burke, Columbia, Glascock, Hancock, Jefferson, Jenkins, Lincoln, McDuffie, Richmond, Taliaferro, Warren, Washington and Wilkes.

Don Grantham, who represents the District 12 Augusta region on the Georgia Department of Transportation's State Transportation Board, doesn't dispute the report's veracity but said it may be distorted by the condition of lesser-used roads and bridges in rural counties.

"I think we've made an awful lot of progress in recent years, but there are still a lot of dirt roads out there," Grantham said.

The vast majority of the 13-county area's vehicular traffic and 75% of its population are concentrated in urban and suburban Richmond and Columbia counties.

Grantham said the report doesn't appear to be accounting for some of the county road and bridge projects plugged into the region's \$713 million Transportation Investment Act program, also known as "TIA" and "T-SPLOST."

The special, 10-year transportation tax, first approved by regional voters in 2012, was approved again by referendum in March. Collections are divided among the counties based on population.

TRIP rated 99 of 850 county- and state-maintained bridges as deficient. "Each day, 115,000 vehicles travel over deficient bridges in the Central Savannah River Area," the report said.

Deficient is not analogous to unsafe, GDOT Regional Spokesman Kyle Collins said. Bridges with deficiencies may be limited to certain vehicle weights until they can be repaired or replaced. Georgia has nearly 15,000 state- and county-maintained bridges.

"We inspect all of them," Collins said.

The TRIP report's deficient-bridge list includes structures currently undergoing repair work. For example, the report lists the area's most deficient bridge as the Fifth Street Bridge over the Savannah River, a structure closed to vehicle traffic over the spring as part of a plan to renovate the nearly 90-year-old bridge into a pedestrian pathway. No. 3 on the list, the

Berckmans Road bridge over Rae's Creek, is undergoing reconstruction through early next year.

TRIP's survey said money expected to be spent on roads, highways and bridges is only 41% of what is needed "to make significant progress towards achieving a state of good repair."



A vehicle crosses the Fifth Street Bridge in this June 2020 file image. The structure has since been closed to vehicle traffic as part of a plan to convert the bridge into a pedestrian-only pathway. [FILE/THE AUGUSTA CHRONICLE]

Area's most deficient bridges

The nonprofit transportation research organization lists the following as the 13-county Augusta area's most deficient bridges:

Rank;Bridge;County;Construction date;Average daily vehicle traffic

- 1.;Fifth Street Bridge/Savannah River;Richmond;1931;3,615
- 2.;Stoney Road/Little Kettle Creek;Wilkes;1967;735
- 3.;Berckmans Road/Rae's Creek;Richmond;1950;15,705
- 4.;State Route 17/Broad River;Wilkes;1971;2,265
- 5.;State Route 23/Brier Creek;Burke;1962;1,770
- 6.;Thompson Bridge Road/Brier Creek Overflow;Burke;1959;1,140
- 7.;Thompson Bridge Road/Brier Creek;Burke;1959;1,080
- 8.;Story Mill Road/Brier Creek;Burke;1968;930
- 9.;Haden Pond Road/Walnut Branch;Burke;1966;900
- 10.;Powelton Church Road/Beaverdam Creek; Hancock;1960;900

Source: National Transportation Research Group (TRIP)