The Augusta Chronicle

Tuesday, November 17, 2020 | THE SOUTH'S OLDEST NEWSPAPER ~ Est. 1785 | @AUG_Chronicle | facebook.com/TheAugustaChronicle | $1.50

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

FRONT PAGE

METRO | A3
FORT GORDON HONORS WWII PRISONERS OF WAR

SPORTS | B1
AFTER MASTERS WIN, JOHNSON NOT HAPPY TO SEE 2020 END

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Richmond, Columbia counties finish recounts

By Joe Hotchkiss
Staff Writer

Volunteers in Richmond and Columbia counties recounted the last of their ballots in the 2020 presidential race Monday afternoon, two days before the designated deadline.

In Richmond County, 42 tables staffed by two workers each methodically confirmed the chosen candidate on each ballot and sorted the pieces of paper by hand at Bell Auditorium in downtown Augusta.

Columbia County finished its recount at the former Euchee Creek Library on Louisville Road in Appling.

Eight volunteers staffed four tables.

Ballots were removed from sealed containers in smaller batches for counting. When each batch was completed, it was counted again, one ballot at a time. Tally sheets recorded the counts in each batch.

Other volunteers, walking between the counting stations, monitored the process to help assure accuracy.

The totals were then entered on computer for delivery to the Secretary of State's Office in Atlanta.

In Richmond County, with ballots from 38 polling sites to tally, the recounting wrapped up about 1 p.m., said Lynn Bailey, executive director of the county's Board of Elections. There were 87,530 ballots in all to recount since Friday, and all of them have been accounted for, she said.

"The poll workers generally do a good job for us on Election Day, and here in Richmond County they do an outstanding job, though I might be a little bit biased," Bailey said.

In Columbia County, the final seven cases of ballots of 71 cases were completely re-tallied by about 1:45 p.m. Each one of the 80,973 ballots cast has been accounted

See RECOUNT, A10

An elections volunteer delivers containers of ballots to counters waiting to re-tally Columbia County presidential vote totals Monday morning at the former Euchee Creek Library in Appling. [JOE HOTCHKISS/THE AUGUSTA CHRONICLE]

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

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

Washington-based nonprofit says one in 10 regional bridges structurally 'deficient'

By Damon Cline
Staff Writer

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."

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)

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See ROADS, A5

2nd virus vaccine shows striking success in US tests

By Lauran Neergaard
The Associated Press

A second experimental COVID-19 vaccine — this one from Moderna Inc. — yielded extraordinarily strong early results Monday, another badly needed dose of hope as the pandemic enters a terrible new phase.

Moderna said its vaccine appears to be 94.5% effective, according to preliminary data from an ongoing study. A week ago, competitor Pfizer Inc. announced its own vaccine looked 90% effective — news that puts both companies on track to seek permission within weeks for emergency use in the U.S.

The results are "truly striking," said Dr. Anthony Fauci, the U.S. government's top infectious-diseases expert. "The vaccines that we're talking about, and vaccines to come, are really the light at the end of the tunnel."

A vaccine can't come fast enough, as virus cases topped 11 million in the U.S. over the weekend — 1 million of them recorded in just the past week — and governors and mayors are ratcheting up restrictions ahead of Thanksgiving. The outbreak has killed more than 1.3 million people worldwide, over 246,000 of them in the U.S.

Stocks rallied on Wall Street and around the world on rising hopes that the global economy could start returning to normal in the coming months. The Dow Jones Industrial Average gained more than 470 points, or 1.6%, to close at a record high of over 29,950. Moderna stock was up almost 10%.

Both vaccines require two shots, given several weeks apart. U.S. officials said they hope to have about 20 million Moderna doses and another 20 million of the vaccine made by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech to use

See VACCINE, A4

OBITUARIES | A6

Annie Bardage, Wrightsville
Claude Blackstone, Martinez
Joe Brooks, Sr., Augusta
Tillman Burns, Grovetown
Douglas Dishmond, Grovetown
Bertha Ellis, Lincolnton
Demetress Howard, Augusta
Mariah Jackson, Wadley
Larry Jordan, Davisboro
Willieferd Luckey, Blythe
Pamela McNeil, Augusta
Dorothy Miles, Beech Island, SC
Eddie Outlaw, Augusta
Hazel Smith, Stapleton
Schnann Wideman, Harlem

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Metro ... A3
Viewpoints ... A8
Business ... A9
Sports ... B1
Television ... B7
Comics ... B8

TODAY Sunny 70°/37°
WEDNESDAY Sunny; cooler 64°/35°
THURSDAY Plenty of sun 64°/40°

The new Berckman's road bridge spanning Rae's Creek in Augusta Monday afternoon [MICHAEL HOLAHAN/THE AUGUSTA CHRONCLE]

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 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."

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Source: National Transportation Research Group (TRIP)