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FRONT PAGE



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FARM & GARDEN, A7

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CARROLL COUNTY'S TRUSTED INFORMATION LEADER SINCE 1871

Report: More funding needed for road and bridge upkeep

Five Carroll bridges raged as 'deficient'

By MICHAEL O'HEARN THE TIMES-GEORGIAN

More funding is needed to keep up with repairs and improvements to the county's roads and bridges, according to a report from a national transportation research group.

Carroll County has five of the 40 most deficient bridges in the Three Rivers region, according to a report for that area from the national Transportation Research Information Program (TRIP) nonprofit.

TRIP conducted the study between December 2019 and February 2020. The organization, which issued similar reports for other regions in the state, examined Three Rivers' travel and population trends, road and bridge conditions, traffic safety, congestion, and transportation funding needs.

These reports, as well as interviews with the reports' authors and infographics, can be found online at tripnet.org/reports/moving-georgiaforward -november-2020/.

The report includes a list of the top 40 most deficient bridges in the region, and Carroll County has five bridges on the list. These are:

- Shady Grove Road at Hominy Creek
- · West Hickory Level Road at the Little Tallapoosa River
- Asbury Road at Trestle Creek
- Lovvorn Mill Road at Big Indian Creek
- Happy Mill Road at Caney Creek

Each of these bridges was built within the last 70 years, with the oldest being the Happy Mill bridge, built eight miles southeast of Carrollton in 1950. The report did not indicate whether the defects of these bridges are safety hazards at this time. Deteriorating bridges such as those found in Carroll County can have several negative impacts on a region, the report says. These include emergency vehicles searching for new routes while responding to calls, and the ability to ship commercial goods to an area because its bridges and roads are not capable of carrying large commercial vehicles.

"Each day, 144,000 vehicles travel over deficient bridges in the Three Rivers region," the report said. "Bridges that are deficient may be posted for lower weight limits, or closed if their condition warrants such action. Deteriorated bridges can have a significant impact on daily life." There are nearly 1,000 bridges in the Three Rivers region, and the study said that 16% of these locally and state-maintained bridges are rated as "deficient." That means these bridges either have significant deterioration of a major component, a restriction to carrying only lighterweight vehicles or have a carrying capacity of 18 tons or less.

The report said that every dollar of road and bridge maintenance that is put off costs an additional \$4 to \$5 in needed future repairs. "The service life of bridges can be extended

by performing routine maintenance such as resurfacing decks, painting surfaces, ensuring that a facility has good drainage and replacing deteriorating components, the report said. "But most bridges will eventually require more costly reconstruction or major rehabilitation to remain operable."

The Three Rivers region contains 10 counties including Carroll, Butts, Coweta, Heard, Lamar, Meriwether, Pike, Spalding, Troup and Upson.

TRIP gathered the information for their report using surveys from county government officials and data from federal and state agencies like the Georgia Department of Transportation, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the Federal Highway Administration. The group created 12 regional reports titled "Moving Georgia Forward" with their findings and presented them this month to transportation committee members of the state legislature and the Georgia Chamber of Commerce. The report for the Three Rivers region was released on

The report also including traffic information for the region, which was home to 521,000 residents in 2018, an increase of 6% since 2010. Vehicle travel within the region totaled 6.8 million miles that year, an increase of 9% since 2015.

Each year, \$843 billion in goods are shipped to and from sites across Georgia, mostly by trucks, according to TRIP data.

Approximately three-quarters of this freight is shipped by truck, and TRIP says the value of this freight is expected to increase 115% in the next 25 years.

Carroll County Public Works and government officials use SPLOST dollars to maintain her bridges and the more than 1,000 miles of road within the county. But the rising costs of materials such as asphalt prevent crews from resurfacing, repaving, or striping every road that needs work each vear.

"The life cycle of Georgia's roads is greatly affected by state and local governments' ability to perform timely maintenance and upgrades to ensure that road and highway surfaces last as long as possible," the report said.

In 2018, county officials tried to introduce a new transportation sales tax, or T-SPLOST to help offset the costs of repairing this infrastructure. But county residents voted against it that November. TRIP's study found that nearly one out of every five county-maintained roads is in poor condition,



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for road and bridge upkeep

Five Carroll bridges that control of the carroll bridges





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30% are in fair condition, and half are in good

However, the report indicates that current county budgets will allow officials to resurface only 8% of the road miles that need repairs. Meanwhile, county leaders can only reconstruct 7% of the miles in need of rehabilitation.

The survey also said that county governments will only be able to spend 34% of the total amount needed annually this year to make "significant progress toward achieving a state of good repair" for these roads, bridges, and highways. Carroll County officials did not immediately respond to questions about how much money the Public Works department has in its budget annually to make repairs to Carroll's roads and bridges.

"Roads rated in poor condition may show signs of deterioration, including rutting, cracks and potholes," the report said. "In some cases, poor roads can be resurfaced but often are too deteriorated and must be reconstructed."