

Road to Recovery: Rebuilding CT's infrastructure

A recent White House report gave Connecticut's infrastructure a grade of C-. Now the state is responding.



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CONNECTICUT, USA — Connecticut's infrastructure is in need of a makeover. Ask residents, and they say the state's highways and roads mean traffic headaches.

"95. 95 is terrible. I used to work down in Stamford and going there was a nightmare every day," said Greg Laflamme of Middletown. Drivers describe the roads as having cracks, rough surfaces, and potholes.

"At this point, it's kind of a joke when I drive there I'm like swerving because I like to know exactly where they all are so I'm kind of like weaving in and out," said Madeline McGrail of Newington.

It could be costing you a lot too. According to [TRIP](#), a national transportation research non-profit, the average Connecticut driver spends about \$711 a year on vehicle operating costs, because of the state's road conditions.

"Wasting gasoline, idling your engine, sitting in traffic. And wear and tear on your vehicle," said Garret Ecalitto, Deputy Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Transportation.

When it comes to CT bridges, TRIP says 248 bridges are considered structurally deficient. Due to some much-needed improvements on rail lines, trains are moving slower than decades ago.

In fact, a recent White House report gave Connecticut's infrastructure a grade of C-.

"62% of Connecticut's major roads are in poor to mediocre condition, and 62% of Connecticut's bridges were built before 1969 with a 50-year lifespan. So, we're in pretty rough shape," said Don Shubert, president of the CT Construction Industries Association.

The DOT has some projects lined up to fix many of these issues, and the key to making them happen sooner rather than later could come in the form of President Biden's \$2.3 trillion infrastructure package.

"Without that, all we'd be able to do is just patch things and keep things going with a state of good repair keeping it a baseline standard of safety but with these additional funds that might be coming forward with the American Jobs Plan we can not only fix it, we can fix it better and fix it for the future," said Ecalitto.

FOX61 got an exclusive look at the plans, which include rebuilding crumbling infrastructure to reduce backups on major highways like I-84 in Danbury or I-95 in Fairfield County.

"If we can extend some of the exit lanes and kind of reduce some of that back up where people are trying to exit or get on-ramp onto the highway, it makes it safer, it reduces crashes," said Ecalitto.

That safety aspect may be the most important. According to the DOT, 2020 was the deadliest year in decades on Connecticut roads. The DOT looking to not only make the roads safer for drivers but everyone around them too.

"Installing crosswalks, high visibility crosswalks including countdown heads," said Ecalitto. "Having better lighting, and installing bike lanes where there's a lot of bike traffic as well," he said.

Perhaps the biggest theme among the projects, updating the state's infrastructure as a whole.

1983 Mianus River I-95 Bridge collapse



Credit: ASSOCIATED PRESS

A 100-foot-long section of the Interstate 95 bridge spanning the Mianus River collapsed in Greenwich, Conn., early on Tuesday, June 29, 1983. Three people were killed and three were seriously injured when their vehicles plunged 70 feet to the river. The cause of the collapse of the bridge is under investigation by authorities. (AP Photo/Bob Child)

"As we replace our infrastructure that's falling apart, we're going to replace it with more modern systems," said Shubert.

Part of modernizing the state's infrastructure is making our streets smarter. Replacing outdated traffic signals with new ones, with technology that allows them to not only communicate with newer cars but also with each other, so you don't have to be stuck in a red light any longer than you have to. It is starting on the Berlin Turnpike.

"If there's really light traffic, they're going to talk to one another up and down the entire Berlin Turnpike and adjust their timing patterns based on the traffic levels," said Ecalitto.

While federal aid would help make it all possible, state lawmakers say we can't just depend on that money, and the time to act on a state level is now.

"Our Special Transportation Fund is rapidly approaching insolvency. We desperately need more dollars in order to bring our infrastructure into the 21st Century," said State Sen. Will Haskell, co-chair of the transportation committee.

"I would like to see anything that comes out be worked on a bipartisan basis that will result in the least amount of cost for Connecticut residents," said State Rep. Devin Carney, ranking member of the transportation committee.

Making the improvements now would have a lasting impact down the road.

"Build for the next 100 years. This is our opportunity to do that," said Ecalitto.