

\$300M needed for Eddy County road repairs, study shows. Lawmakers look to fund the work



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Danger for drivers on U.S. Highway 285 in southern Eddy County and west Texas continues to grow as more vehicles go on the road. In response, law enforcement from both states worked together to increase police presence. *Wochit*

The New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) secured major funding from the New Mexico Legislature for an Eddy County road project that could cost millions of dollars based on a recent report.

A study conducted by [TRIP](#), a Washington, D.C.-based national transportation research nonprofit group, said NMDOT's District Two in the southeast portion of the state had eight projects totaling \$900 million, including reconstruction of two major state highways near Carlsbad. Per NMDOT's website, [District 2](#) oversees eight counties, including Eddy, with 7,500 lane miles for maintenance.

The study estimated the cost of reconstruction of the [New Mexico State Road 31 and New Mexico State Road 128](#) at \$300 million, including reconstruction of a four-lane highway, alternating passing lanes, bridge replacement and major section improvements.

NMDOT District 2 Engineer Francisco Sanchez said the New Mexico Legislature appropriated about \$143 million from [House Bill 2](#) (HB-2) for the project during a special session in December 2021.

"That's really going to help us shore up our first phase that of design-build, which is scheduled to go to construction in spring of 2023," he said. "Right now we're trying to get our documents together to secure our design-build contractor for that first phase."

An NMDOT website said the "design-build" format provided funding flexibility and allowed the department to move towards construction sooner.

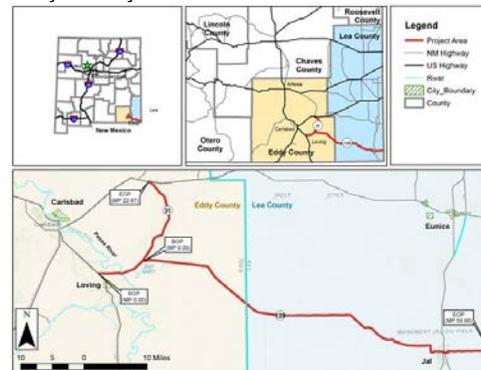
"This is possible as NMDOT needs to complete 30 percent of the design, in the form of an enhanced conceptual design, before it is released to potential design-build contractors for bidding, and thereafter to the selected design-build contractor for completion," the website stated. The State Road 31 portion of the project extended 22 miles from a junction with U.S. Highway 285 to U.S. Highway 62.

"The New Mexico (State Road) 128 (project) extends 60 miles from New Mexico 31 through the City of Jal to the Texas state line," the website indicated.

Sanchez said NMDOT was looking over multiple options for the project.

The TRIP report indicated NMDOT also needed \$55 million for minor pavement rehabilitation work along a nearly 70 mile stretch of U.S.

62/180, which extends to Whites City in southern Eddy County to Hobbs.



A map from the NMDOT shows a major highway project for New Mexico State Road 31 and New Mexico State Road 128. Construction was slated to start in 2023. *New Mexico Department of Transportation*

Report found New Mexico infrastructure deteriorated

The study indicated roads and bridges across New Mexico were decayed, congested or lacked desirable safety features, costing New Mexicans \$3 billion annually.

The report found that throughout New Mexico, more than half of major locally- and state-maintained roads are in poor or mediocre condition.

About 5 percent of locally and state-maintained bridges (20 feet or more in length) were rated poor or structurally deficient, per the study, and New Mexico had the third-highest traffic fatality rate. New Mexico's major urban roads are congested, read the report, causing significant delays.

"It really makes you look at our roads and bridges from a different perspective," Sanchez said.

The report said congested roads in New Mexico cost drivers \$845 million each year in the form of lost time and wasted fuel.

"Traffic congestion in the state's largest urban area results in the average driver losing 45 hours annually in traffic delays and wasting 21 gallons of fuel, costing the average driver there \$1,041 annually in lost time and wasted fuel," the report noted.

Sanchez said the report gave NMDOT a different outlook on the road and bridge situation in New Mexico.

Good roads mean good economy?

The report said efficiency and routine maintenance of New Mexico's roads was critical to a healthy economy.

"Annually, \$120 billion in goods are shipped to and from New Mexico, relying heavily on the state's network of roads and bridges. Increasingly, companies are looking at the quality of a region's transportation system when deciding where to re-locate or expand," read the report.

"Regions with congested or poorly maintained roads may see businesses relocate to areas with a smoother, more efficient and more modern transportation system."



A tractor-trailer down U.S. 285 in Artesia on Jan. 31, 2022. A recent report said highways and bridges across New Mexico were decayed. *Mike Smith Current-Argus*

Nearly 349,000 full-time jobs in New Mexico industries including tourism, retail sales, agriculture and manufacturing were dependent on the quality, safety, and reliability of the state's transportation infrastructure network, read the report.

"New Mexico's highway needs are so essential to our agriculture, mining, oil & gas industries," said New Mexico State Rep. Rebecca Dow (R-38). "We need a good balance between populated and rural New Mexico. Our state's economy will grow only if we have a good transportation system. That's how jobs are created."

Sanchez said NMDOT planned on gathering an asset management plan for the Federal Highway Administration.

"Right now with our asset management program we're trying to determine what levels are acceptable for poor, fair and good and how much money it's going to take to keep at those levels," he said.

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