

Iowa's rural bridges are the worst in the nation, according to report



[Francesca Block](#)

Des Moines Register

Published October 14, 2022

Iowa's rural bridges are the worst in the nation, according to a new national report.

More than one-fifth – 21 percent – of Iowa's rural bridges are structurally deficient, [according to a report released by TRIP](#), a research nonprofit that studies national transportation issues. The share of rural bridges in poor condition in Iowa is over 2.5 times the national average and ranks Iowa highest in the nation.

Structural deficiencies pose major challenges to the rural economy, limiting the weight of vehicles that are allowed to cross and forcing larger vehicles to take long detours.

"The quality of life in America's small communities and rural areas, and the health of the nation's rural economy, is highly reliant on the quality of the nation's transportation system, particularly its roads, highways and bridges," according to the report.



This bridge on Ken Road south of Ames in rural Story County is closed due to age and failing structural integrity. Story County has a total of 270 bridges. Eight of them are closed. Story County Engineer Darren Moon said that six more bridges will likely be closed in the near future due to age and failing structural integrity. *Nirmalendu Najumdar/Ames*

damage that may need repair or replacement in the near future."



According to a construction industry report released in February, almost 56,000 U.S. bridges are structurally deficient. The report includes more than 5,000 bridges in Iowa. *Brian Smith/The Register*

The Iowa DOT states the majority of these bridges have low traffic volumes, with approximately half carrying fewer than 35 vehicles per day.

However, poor bridge and road conditions across rural Iowa continue to affect driver safety. The report states 20% of rural roads in Iowa are also in poor or mediocre condition. These more challenging conditions for drivers likely contribute to the high fatality rate on rural roads — 1.61 per 100 million miles of travel — which is more than double the fatality rate of all other roads in the state, according to the report.

There are 23,799 bridges across the state, according to the Iowa DOT; 4,599 are rated by the Federal Highway Administration as being in "poor" condition. Data from the Federal Highway Administration released earlier this year called nearly 1,800 of these bridges "basically intolerable," including 140 in the Des Moines metro.

While the [Iowa DOT's 2022 annual report](#) states bridges classified as "poor" are not "unsafe," it recognizes that these bridges "have deterioration or