

Maine's rural roads and bridges among the worst in U.S.



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The \$97.5 million reconstruction of an international bridge linking the Aroostook County town of Madawasaka to Edmundston, New Brunswick, is slated for completion in 2023.

[By Laurie Schreiber](#) | October 14, 2022

Maine's rural roads and bridges are among the nation's most deteriorated, with a significant backlog of repairs and improvements needed.

A new report released Thursday by TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit in Washington, D.C., found that 15% of Maine's rural bridges are in poor and structurally deficient condition, the sixth-highest rate in the country.

One in five rural roads in Maine is rated in poor condition — the 10th-highest rate in the nation — and 23% are in mediocre condition.

"In Maine, rural communities are the backbone of our state," Dana Connors, president of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, said in a news release. "Having 20% of rural roads in poor condition puts our communities at a disadvantage, along with the many businesses and our citizens who depend on getting products to their customers."

He added, "The longer we wait to make our roads, bridges, rail lines, or any infrastructure safe, the more it will cost."

Neglected infrastructure

Bridges rated poor and structurally deficient have significant deterioration to the major components of the bridge and are often posted for lower weight, or closed to traffic. Large vehicles, including agricultural equipment,

commercial trucks, school buses and emergency services vehicles, are often restricted or redirected.

On Maine's non-interstate, rural roads, the rate of traffic fatalities is more than double the fatality rate on all other roads in the state — 1.67 per 100 million vehicle miles of travel versus 0.71. There were 123 fatalities on Maine's non-interstate, rural roads in 2020.

Rural roads are more likely to have narrow lanes, limited shoulders, sharp curves, exposed hazards, pavement drop-offs, steep slopes and limited clear zones along roadsides.

Neglecting infrastructure has consequences for the economy and the safety of motorists, noted Patrick Moody of AAA Northern New England.

"Last year 42,915 people died in motor crashes in the United States," Moody said. "We know that the vast majority of crashes are due to human error, but roads and bridges in poor condition add to the challenge of safe driving on our rural roads."

Nationwide backlog

The report, "Rural Connections: Examining the Safety, Connectivity, Condition and Funding Needs of America's Rural Roads & Bridges," finds that the United States' rural transportation system needs immediate improvements to address deficient roads and bridges, high crash rates and inadequate connectivity and capacity.

All together, the U.S. faces a \$180 billion backlog in funding for needed repairs and improvements to the rural transportation system.

The rural transportation system provides the first and last link in the supply chain from farm to market, connects manufacturers to their customers, supports the tourism industry, and enables the production of energy, food and fiber. Rural residents are more reliant on the quality of their transportation system than their urban counterparts, with vehicle travel in rural communities averaging approximately 50% higher than in urban communities.

To read the full report, [click here](#).