

Underfunding may slow repairs on PA's old bridges, report says. Many are in Bucks County

Jess Rohan, Bucks County Courier Times
Wednesday, June 26, 2024

Pennsylvania doesn't have enough money for bridge repairs, and without additional funding, the condition of spans across the state will decline, according to a June [report](#) from transportation research nonprofit TRIP.

A decade ago, Pennsylvania had the worst bridges in the nation: nearly a quarter of the state's bridges were rated "poor condition" by the Federal Highway Administration. But, federal and state funding began to reverse that trend.

This year, only 13% of Pennsylvania bridges are rated poor. But Pennsylvania's bridges are set to backslide into disrepair again without additional funding to cover rising construction costs, the TRIP report said. Bridge decline would hit hard in Bucks County, which has more poor-condition bridges than almost any county in the state, including Philadelphia.



Stonebridge Road over Deep Run in Bedminster is closed as seen on Friday, Feb. 18, 2022. The bridge can collapse any minute with a rating of "imminent failure" for both road and its support structure.

Inflation has almost totally negated recent federal funding increases, said Rocky Moretti, the research director at TRIP, in a Thursday morning news conference. While a 2021 federal infrastructure bill increased bridge funding by 46%, inflation has raised construction costs by 44% since 2022.

"Inflation is starting to impact the progress of this program," Moretti said, referring to federal transportation infrastructure funding.

That includes Bucks County where bids from construction companies for county infrastructure projects have gone up, said Jim O'Malley, the deputy director of public information.

Construction industry analysts point to a variety of factors contributing to inflation, from [interest rates](#) to [supply chain weaknesses](#) exacerbated by the pandemic to [anticompetitive software practices](#).

Most bridges in poor condition pose no immediate risk to travelers, Moretti noted as

dangerous bridges are closed as soon as they are identified. O'Malley added that the county only owns a fraction of the bridges within its borders — others, including interstate highway bridges, are owned by the state.



Century Lane Crossing on the Poquessing Creek in Bensalem as seen on Friday, Feb. 18, 2022. Around 39 thousand drivers pass over this bridge every day which was constructed in 1853.

However, the proportion of poor-condition spans owned by the county or local municipalities is much higher than state-owned bridges in Bucks: 20% of locally owned bridges are in poor condition versus 13% of state-owned bridges, according to [PennDOT data](#).

Most of the poor-condition bridges are owned by the county.

Bucks is on track to reopen four more bridges this year, O'Malley said, noting that county-owned bridges can be found "from the heart of Levittown to deep in the woods on a dirt road," and pointed to two recent examples.

The Stockton Avenue Bridge in New Hope, completed last year, is one of the larger county-owned bridges to be repaired and the [Sheep Hole Road span](#) over Tinicum Creek is among the most rural. Workers had to pause construction on a bridge in Durham Township this year for trout season, O'Malley said.

Several bridges along the Delaware River are owned by the Delaware River Joint Toll Bridge Commission, a bi-state agency. The commission plans to renovate the Uhlerstown-Frenchtown Bridge in 2025, increasing travel times from Tinicum to Frenchtown. The next-closest bridge to New Jersey, the Upper Black Eddy Milford Bridge, is about three miles north. The Uhlerstown-Frenchtown Bridge was rated in [good condition](#) in 2022.

PennDOT also owns a number of smaller bridges in the county.

The TRIP report lists a Callowhill Road bridge in Hilltown Township as among the worst bridges in the Philadelphia area. The bridge, which is owned by PennDOT, saw more than 5,000 vehicles per day before it was closed [in 2021](#), when it was damaged in a storm. The bridge is scheduled to reopen this fall,

PennDOT said. Another PennDOT-owned bridge in Tinicum, closed more than a decade ago, is [set to revert](#) to township ownership after [years of litigation](#) over PennDOT's demolition of the bridge.

Will Simons, spokesperson for Gov. Shapiro, noted that the governor's first budget added \$125 million in funding for roads and bridges. The state repaired 74 bridges in 2023, and has begun repairing 161 bridges this year, Simons added.

"Gov. Shapiro's 2024-25 budget would deliver another \$125 million for road and bridge infrastructure, and over 4 years, the governor's plan would deliver over \$1 billion in additional state and federal funding for our roadways," Simons said.

Dilapidated bridges also affect business in the state, said Dan DeBone, the president of Westmoreland County's chamber of commerce. Officials often lower the weight limits on poor-condition bridges as a safety measure, which limits the routes that industry can use to transport heavier loads. Long-term bridge closures increase travel time for workers.



A sign before the Aramingo Ave. exit on I-95N alerts drivers of the temporary closure of I-95 North due to an emergency overhead bridge repair in Northeast Philadelphia on Tuesday, April 2, 2024.

A 50% funding increase would keep bridge conditions at near their current level, Moretti said. Without a funding increase, Pennsylvania will see nearly a fifth of its bridges in poor condition by 2029, he said.

This article originally appeared on Bucks County Courier Times: [Repairs on Pennsylvania's bridges set to fall behind — again](#)