

One in 10 Lehigh Valley bridges are in poor condition, nonprofit report says

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PennDOT officials expect to begin building the replacement to the Cementon Bridge in Spring 2023. The 90-year-old bridge carries Route 329 over the Lehigh River.

BETHLEHEM, Pa. — A wide swath of bridges in the Lehigh Valley and across Pennsylvania are in poor condition, according to a national research group focused on transportation.

A significant number of the state's bridges have surpassed or are approaching 50 years old, and new funding is needed to prevent significant issues in deterioration, according to "Preserving Pennsylvania's Bridges," a new [26-page report](#) by The National Transportation Group, or TRIP.

TRIP, based in Washington, D.C., is a nonprofit dedicated to economic and technical data on surface transportation.

The study states that in Lehigh and Northampton counties, about 367,000 vehicles travel across poor-condition bridges in the region daily.

That's 10% of locally and state-maintained bridges 20 feet or longer. Of those 680 bridges, 67 in the Lehigh Valley covered by the report are rated in poor condition.

In addition, 383 bridges, or 56%, are rated to be "fair," meaning there's minor deterioration but structural elements are sound.

The remaining bridges are in good condition.

"Deteriorated bridges can have a significant impact on daily life. Restrictions on vehicle weight may cause many vehicles — especially emergency vehicles, commercial trucks, school buses and farm equipment — to use alternate routes to avoid weight-restricted bridges. Redirected trips also lengthen travel time, waste fuel and reduce the efficiency of the local economy."

"Preserving Pennsylvania's Bridges"

"Deteriorated bridges can have a significant impact on daily life," the report states. It says bridges in poor condition may be posted for lower weight limits or closed if their condition warrants such action.

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Of all the Lehigh Valley bridges in dataset, the average age is 57 years, compared with a statewide average of 55 years.

Of poor-condition bridges, the average age in the Lehigh Valley is 93 years.

Data from the report is sourced from the [Federal Highway Administration's National Bridge Inventory](#), which rates all bridges carrying vehicular traffic of 20 feet or longer.

Statewide concern

Pennsylvania got national spotlight in recent years following bridge collapses on [Philadelphia's Interstate 95](#) and [Pittsburgh's Fern Hollow Bridge](#).

Statewide, the report says 13%, or 2,835 of 22,043 of the same category of bridges are rated in poor condition. That's sixth highest in the nation, it says.

The report says that Pennsylvania's share of bridges in poor condition decreased from 23% in 2013, the highest in the nation at the time, to 13% in 2024.

That's because of increased transportation funding at state and federal levels. But that share of poor condition bridges is expected to increase to 17% by 2029 due to deterioration, it says.

Across the state, it says 10.1 million vehicles cross Pennsylvania bridges rated in poor condition.



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Traffic at right moves north on Route 378 over the Hill to Hill Bridge, in Bethlehem, Pa. on February 9, 2023.

It states that nearly two-thirds — 64% — of Pennsylvania's bridges are rural, with 36% being urban bridges.

In 2023, 15% of the state's rural bridges were in poor condition, while 10% of Pennsylvania's urban bridges were in poor condition, according to the report.

Lehigh Valley bridges highlighted

The report lists the five most traveled "poor" bridges in the state's major metros, including the Lehigh Valley.

The bridges listed in Lehigh and Northampton counties are:

- Route over Mickley Road (Whitehall Township)
- Route 33 over Buskill Creek northbound (Palmer Township)
- Route 33 over Buskill Creek Southbound (Palmer Township)
- Pennsylvania Turnpike Lehigh Valley Interchange Ramp AB (South Whitehall Township)
- 8th Avenue over Norfolk Southern Railroad at the Route 378 interchange (Bethlehem)

It also details the five "poor" bridges in urban areas based on deck, substructure and superstructure ratings. Each major component is given a rating of 0-9, with 4 or below considered poor condition in the data.

The bridges listed in Lehigh and Northampton counties are:

- Walnut Street over Cedar Creek near St. Elmo Street and Reading Road (Allentown)
- State 611 over Oughoughton Creek near Richmond Road (Washington Township)
- Indian trail Road/Route 3016 over Hokendauqua Creek (Allen Township)
- South Main Street / Route 1015 over Martins Creek (Bangor)
- Mosserville Road / Route 4024 over Ontelaunee Creek (Lynn Township)

Funding improvement needed

The report states that despite substantial improvements in bridge conditions over the past decade, Pennsylvania still faces significant deficiencies and needs additional funding to avoid any reversal of bridge improvements.

Funding has increased, but TRIP Director of Policy & Research Rocky Moretti said that despite progress, there's still a lot of risk going into the future.

"Pennsylvania faces the challenge of preserving and modernizing its bridges," Moretti said. "The reality now is the state could see this reduce without a significant boost in funding for bridge repairs across the state."

TRIP Director of Policy & Research Rocky Moretti

"Pennsylvania faces the challenge of preserving and modernizing its bridges," Moretti said. "The reality now is the state could see this reduce without a significant boost in funding for bridge repairs across the state."

He said the report does not highlight an imminent danger so much as a need for investment.

"Certainly the state's transportation inspectors, if they felt that a bridge was putting the public in danger, the bridge would be closed," Moretti said.

"Or at the very least restricted to lighter weight vehicles.

"So we're not trying to use that number, you know, irresponsibly, we're just pointing out that at the end of the day in Pennsylvania, more than 10 million vehicles a day are crossing these bridges."



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This view is looking south over the Fahy Bridge towards Southside Bethlehem in Bethlehem, Pa.. Picture made in February, 2023.

Necessary funding 'imperative'

In a presentation highlighting the report, Dan DeBone, chief executive officer of Westmoreland County Chamber of Commerce in Western Pennsylvania, said the issue is a deeply important one to his region's manufacturing and other economic sectors.

"The efficient movement of these goods is vital, not only to our region, but also to the economic lifeline we depend on, heavily reliant on our ability to utilize safe, dependable bridges," DeBone said.

"Every single day, thousands of workers and countless goods travel in these bridges. Any disruption could have severe consequences for local businesses, employment and the wider economy."

Dan DeBone, chief executive officer of Westmoreland County Chamber of Commerce

"Without this, we risk not only safety of our citizens, but also the economic stability that these industries provide every day.

"Every single day, thousands of workers and countless goods travel in these bridges. Any disruption could have severe consequences for local businesses, employment and the wider economy.

"Therefore, it's imperative that we secure the necessary funding and commitment from the state to ensure our infrastructure can meet the demands of today and the challenges of tomorrow."

He said despite progress made via 2013's [Act 89 Transportation Bill](#) and 2007's Act 44 that required the state Turnpike Commission to provide annual payments to the state Department of Transportation, a lot needs to be done to offset rising inflation and material costs for bridge repair and replacement.

Also cited in the report as potential relief were highway and bridge improvements earmarked under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act passed signed into law in 2021.

Concerns exist also for the future of the current funding structure. The study notes the potential reduction in gasoline tax revenue because of greater vehicle efficiencies and electric vehicle adoption.