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## State makes progress in fixing bridges, but report warns that may change without additional funding

by [Ed Blazina](#) | June 20, 2024

### CONDITION OF PENNSYLVANIA BRIDGES BY CITY

Here is a breakdown of the condition of bridges across Pennsylvania. A study released Thursday by national nonprofit TRIP projected that the state won't be able to continue reducing the number of poor bridges after 2029 unless there is additional funding.

LOCATION	POOR		FAIR		GOOD		TOTAL BRIDGES
	Number	Share	Number	Share	Number	Share	
ERIE	43	10%	229	52%	172	39%	444
HARRISBURG	151	10%	935	60%	465	30%	1,551
LEHIGH VALLEY	67	10%	383	56%	230	34%	680
PHILADELPHIA	438	14%	1,893	60%	835	26%	3,166
PITTSBURGH	510	12%	2,204	53%	1,476	35%	4,190
SCRANTON/WILKES-BARRE	215	22%	418	43%	329	34%	962
<b>PENNSYLVANIA STATEWIDE</b>	<b>2,835</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>11,849</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>7,359</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>22,043</b>

SOURCE: FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION NATIONAL BRIDGE INVENTORY

Jennifer Kundrach/Pittsburgh Union Progress

Pennsylvania has made substantial progress in reducing the number of bridges rated in poor condition over the past 10 years.

But unless transportation funding increases in the next few years, the number of poorly rated bridges will begin increasing again by 2029, according to a study released Thursday by TRIP, a national transportation nonprofit.

In 2014, Pennsylvania ranked the worst in the country with more than 25% of its bridges rated in poor condition. Through a state funding package known as Act 89, the state has reduced the number of bridges rated in poor condition to about 13%, said Rocky Moretti, TRIP's director of policy and research.

"The reality now is the state could see that progress reversed in the next few years," Moretti said during a news conference about the study.

Right now, Pennsylvania is staying even with the number of bridges in poor condition through more than \$4 billion in federal stimulus money, which has increased Pennsylvania Department of Transportation funding by 46%. Inflation has eaten away all but 2% of that money, Moretti said, and when it runs out in the next couple of years the number of bridges in poor condition will begin increasing again to 17% by 2029 unless there is new funding.

The study says a 50% increase in funding would allow the state share of poorly rated bridge to remain almost steady at 14%.

Larry Shifflet, PennDOT's executive deputy secretary, said the department is happy with the progress TRIP cited, but he agreed there is a looming problem without more money for road and bridge work. A big reason for that is that the state actually began its major effort to upgrade poor bridges around 2008, and many of those same bridges are considered in fair condition again and headed for poor without additional work.

The TRIP study reported that 54% of the state's bridges (11,849) are in fair condition and the average age of state bridges is 55 years old, already beyond the normal 50-year expected lifespan.

"We're at that breaking point," Shifflet said in an interview Friday. "There are a significant number of bridges in that fair category. In the next few years, we will have to do something about funding."

Former Gov. Tom Wolf had an extensive proposal to increase money for transportation by establishing delivery surcharges for delivery services such as Amazon and increasing fees for drivers who use electric cars and don't pay the state gasoline tax that provides a vast majority of funding for road and bridge improvements. But his term ended before that could be approved, and current Gov. Josh Shapiro's administration has concentrated on obtaining as much of the federal stimulus money as possible instead of proposing a new funding method.

Shifflet noted that Shapiro followed through on one key Wolf recommendation: returning \$500 million to the Motor License Fund over four years that had been used to pay for state police patrols on state roads. Police will be paid from the state general fund, freeing the Motor License Fund money for road and bridge work.

When the federal stimulus funds expire in 2026, state and federal officials will have to find other funding sources, Shifflet said.

"At the end of that, we'll see what happens," he said. "That will be a mountain to climb down the road. I think the goal will be to find a way to not have that number of poor bridges increase again."

Bridges are rated at least every two years under federal Department of Transportation rules. Bridges rated in poor condition often remain open because they are not believed to be in danger of falling down, but they have serious structural problems and often have weight restrictions that limit what kind of vehicles can use them.

In the Pittsburgh area, where 12% of bridges are rated in poor condition, TRIP estimates 1.2 million vehicles use those bridges every day. Across the state, 10.1 million vehicles cross bridges rated in poor condition every day.

Bridges that close or have weight restrictions have a substantial impact on the ability to move freight by truck. In 2022, the state moved 897 million tons of freight worth \$1.1 trillion, the fifth largest value in the country.

That is projected to nearly double by 2050.

Dan DeBone, president and CEO of the Westmoreland County Chamber of Commerce, said during the news conference that a strong road and bridge inventory is a key issue that developers look at when they consider coming to the area. Any decline in the condition of bridges locally and across the state could cause "serious disruption" in freight movement, he said.

"If [a company] is producing a massive product and they can't ship their product .... That is a big problem for our county," DeBone said. "[Funding] has got to be predictable, it's got to be reliable, and it's got to keep growing."

Tim Phelps, executive director of the Transportation Management Association of Chester County, said bridges are "lifelines" for the local economy. Any increase in the number of bridges with poor ratings could have "severe" ramifications for economic development, he said. TRIP reviews transportation issues in 12 to 15 states each year.