

Report: PA bridges better, but much left to do

Several of top 10 most poorly rated bridges in the greater Philly area are local



The Keim Street bridge was closed to traffic in 2010 after being found to be structurally unsound. It was recently listed in a report to be among the region's most unsafe bridges. (MediaNews Group File Photo)

By [MediaNews Group](#)

June 21, 2024

Fourteen percent of bridges in the Philadelphia area are rated in poor condition, with approximately 4.5 million vehicles traveling across these poorly-rated area bridges each day. This is according to a new report released today by TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based national transportation research nonprofit.

And yes, to no one's surprise, the report includes the much-missed Keim Street bridge between Pottstown and North Coventry.

The report looked at bridges 20 feet or longer and encompasses those in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia counties. A bridge is rated in poor condition if there is significant deterioration of the bridge deck, supports or other major components.

Of the 10 most heavily traveled bridges rated poor in the report; two are local. One is the Route 422 bridge over Sanatoga Road and Sanatoga Creek in Lower Pottsgrove, and the other is the Route 30 Brandywine by-pass bridge over Creek Road and Brandywine Creek in East Caln.

Thankfully, PennDOT is in the process of reconstructing and widening the Route 422 bridge over Sanatoga Creek, built in 1965, although it is causing some traffic headaches currently.



This view from the Park Road bridge shows the Route 422 construction near to the bridge over Sanatoga Creek and Sanatoga Road. (Evan Brandt — MediaNews Group)

That work is part of an \$83.6 million [project](#) to reconstruct and improve approximately 2.1 miles of the expressway and replace bridges between the Sanatoga Interchange and Porter Road in Lower Pottsgrove.

A culvert at Sprogels Run, located just east of Porter Road, along with an existing single-span bridge carrying U.S. 422 over Porter Road, will be removed and replaced with a new two-span bridge.

Of the top 10 poor/structurally deficient bridges in the Philadelphia area carrying less traffic, at least 500 vehicles per day, that have the lowest average rating for deck, substructure and superstructure, two are in Chester County and five are in Montgomery County.

Bridges the report lists in Montgomery County are:

- Keim Street bridge in Pottstown over the Schuylkill River, which is closed;
- The Perkiomenville Road bridge over Scioto Creek in Frederick, which is posted;
- Mill Creek Road bridge over Mill Creek near Route 30, which is closed;
- Fetters Mill Road over Pennypack Creek near Route 232, which is closed;
- Snyder Road of Perkiomen Creek, township not listed, which is closed.

The two Chester County bridges are:

- Embreeville Road over the west branch of Brandywine Creek in Embreeville;

- North Pennocks Bridge Road over the west branch of White Clay Creek at the New London Airport.



In the greater Philadelphia region, more than 4.5 million vehicles per day travel over bridges rated to be in "poor" condition according to a new report. (Image courtesy of TRIP)

The TRIP report, "Preserving Pennsylvania's Bridges: The Condition and Funding Needs of Pennsylvania's Aging Bridge System," finds that while the state has made significant progress in the past decade in reducing the number of bridges in poor condition, deficiencies remain and the progress that has been made may be lost without additional funding. The lack of funding is compounded by inflation in construction costs — which have risen 69 percent

since the beginning of 2021 — significantly reducing the buying power of existing transportation funding.

Statewide, 13 percent (2,835 of 22,043) of bridges are rated in poor condition, the sixth highest share in the nation, according to the report. Fifty-four percent of Pennsylvania bridges are rated in fair condition and 33 percent are in good condition. Pennsylvania's share of bridges in poor condition decreased from 23 percent in 2013 — the highest in the nation at that time — to 13 percent in 2024 as a result of increased transportation funding at the state and federal levels. However, despite recent progress, under current funding levels, the share of poor bridges in Pennsylvania is expected to increase to 17 percent in 2029.

To address a lack of adequate transportation funding, in 2013 Act 89 was passed by Pennsylvania's legislature and signed into law by the governor, providing an additional \$2.3 billion in transportation funding each year and allowing the state to improve or rebuild thousands of bridges and more than 10,000 roadway miles.

Since the passage of Act 89 in 2013, the number of poor bridges in the state has decreased by 42 percent. In addition to state funding, the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) was signed into law in November 2021 and will provide \$13.1 billion in state funds for highway and bridge investments in Pennsylvania over five years, including a 46 percent funding increase over the first three years of the program from FY 2022 to FY 2024. Federal funds currently support 43 percent of the revenue used by PennDOT to fund highway and bridge improvements.



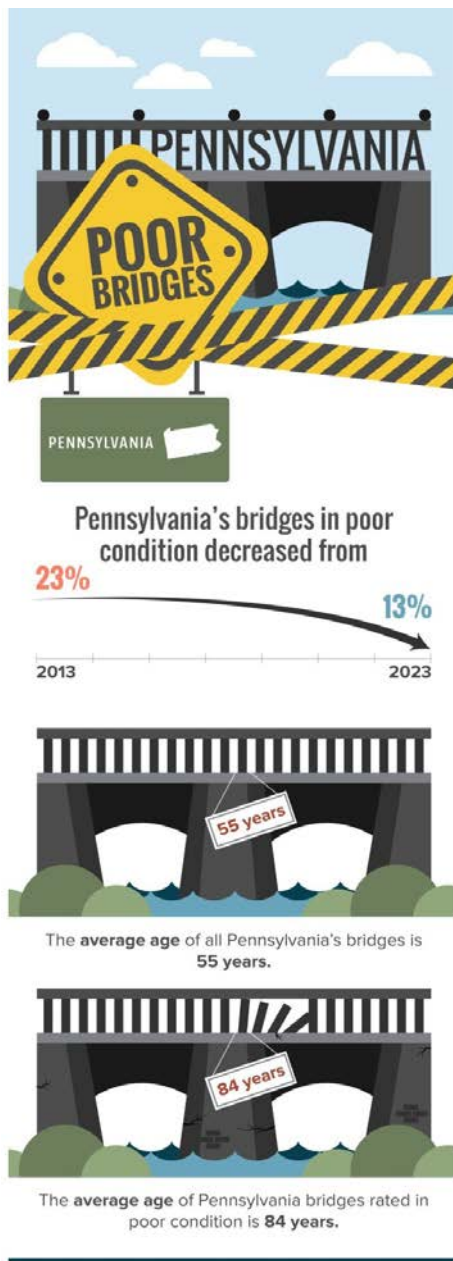
P. Timothy Phelps, executive director of the Transportation Management Association of Chester County, said his organization “stands in strong support of continued investment in bridge infrastructure.” (Image via TRIP)

P. Timothy Phelps, executive director of the Transportation Management Association of Chester County, said “a robust, safe infrastructure supports a multimodal transportation system, offering residents choices and fostering

safe, connected communities. When bridges close, everyone is impacted.”

He said his organization “stands in strong support of continued investment in bridge infrastructure. To us, our bridges are more than just stone, concrete and steel structures, they are vital connections that help support our way of life.”

Bridges are vital to “cars carrying our workforce, school buses carrying our children, fire trucks and ambulances rushing to emergencies and trucks delivering essential goods and services,” said Phelps.



Thanks to increased funding, Pennsylvania has fewer poorly rated bridges than it did 10 years ago. (Image courtesy of TRIP)

The ability of revenue from Pennsylvania and the federal motor fuel taxes – and other sources of state and federal

transportation funding – to keep pace with the state's future transportation needs is likely to erode as a result of increasing vehicle fuel efficiency, the increasing use of electric vehicles and inflation in highway construction costs. The Federal Highway Administration's national highway construction cost index, which measures labor and materials cost, increased by 44 percent in 2022 and the first three quarters of 2023, and has increased by 69 percent since the beginning of 2021.

“Highways and bridges in Pennsylvania and beyond are vital to the supply chain and our nation's economy,” said Rebecca Oyler, president and CEO of the Pennsylvania Motor Truck Association. “Tens of thousands of trucks rely on safe, well-maintained infrastructure to deliver goods to businesses and consumers every day. This report highlights the fact that targeting funding into specific infrastructure improvements, like deficient bridges, is a sound investment strategy. This should be a high priority of PennDOT and other state decision-makers to ensure our supply chain remains intact and to keep inflation at bay.”

“Pennsylvania's bridges are a critical component of the state's transportation system, providing connections for personal mobility, economic growth and quality of life,” said Dave Kearby, TRIP's executive director. “While Pennsylvania has made commendable progress in improving bridge conditions over the past decade, without increased and reliable transportation funding, numerous projects to improve and preserve aging bridges in the Philadelphia area and statewide will not move forward, hampering Pennsylvania's ability to efficiently and safely move people and goods.”