

Report details damage caused by Helene to WNC's transportation infrastructure

BPR News | By [Felicia Sonmez](#)
Published June 9, 2025

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Sen. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) surveys damage caused by Hurricane Helene to Interstate 40 on Monday, Feb. 10, 2025.

A report details the damage Hurricane Helene caused to Western North Carolina's transportation infrastructure. The study indicates the cost of recovery could put a strain on other parts of the North Carolina Department of Transportation budget.

Repairing all of North Carolina's roads, highways and bridges damaged by Helene will cost about \$5 billion, according to TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that researches transportation issues.

The group [released its report](#) last week on Western North Carolina's recovery.

Rocky Moretti, TRIP's director of policy and research, said that even though the federal government will pay about 80% of that cost, the remaining 20% adds up to more than \$900 million.

"That's the equivalent of about 18 months of (road) resurfacing across the state, three years of their ongoing bridge program. You can see the significant impact that that would have long-term in North Carolina," Moretti said during a news conference Thursday.

Moretti says that's likely to put a huge strain on the state's ability to address other transportation challenges – for example, paying for regular road maintenance.

Alyson Tamer with the NCDOT said the effect would likely be statewide.

"We would take that from all the divisions across the state," Tamer said. "But when we're looking at resurfacing projects, there is a prioritization that goes into that. So certainly, as there is need in various areas, I'm sure they would be looking at that strategically."

All of this has the business community concerned about its ability to regain its financial footing.

Kit Cramer is president and CEO of the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce. She noted that Helene severely impacted not only transportation but also the region's water and communications systems.

"We have recovered in many, many ways in that regard. But we still need help in getting this infrastructure – especially transportation infrastructure – addressed," she said.

Adding to the problem is the slow pace of federal reimbursements. NCDOT pays all costs up front. So far, the state has only been reimbursed for about 23% of the money it's spent on transportation recovery. State elected officials are asking Congress for help in picking up the pace.

NCDOT said it will take another three-and-a-half years to complete all of the transportation repairs. There has been significant progress: 97% of the roads that closed because of Helene have reopened, although not all are fully restored.