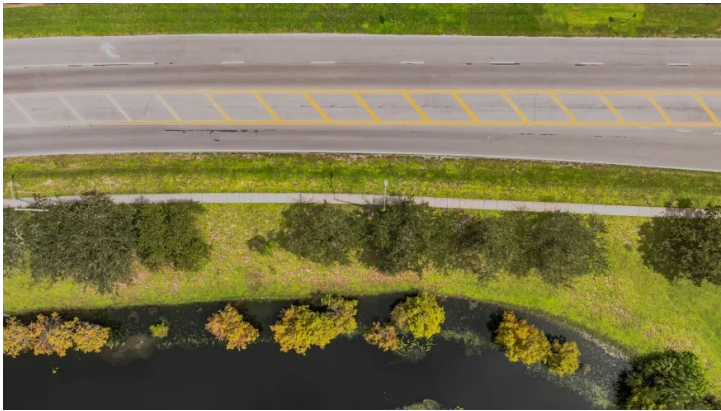


WMBB Panama City

Report: Congestion, fatalities, freight movements rise on Florida's rural roads

Stephanie Pitts | February 6, 2026



Aerial view of an empty road beside a green pond on a sunny day in Florida

FLORIDA ([WMBB](#)) – During a news conference on Friday, speakers discussed the findings of a new report on how Florida's rural roadways have increased congestion, fatality rates and freight movements.

The National Transportation Research Nonprofit's (TRIP) new report, "Keeping Rural Florida Connected," analyzes the safety, condition and performance of Florida's rural roads.

According to the report, 32 out of 62 counties in Florida are classified as rural. With Walton, Holmes, Washington, Jackson, Calhoun, Gulf, Liberty, and Franklin counties included.

With over half of the state's counties considered rural, concerns regarding the safety and reliability of these roads have grown, as Florida's investments in rural roadways have not expanded enough to accommodate the increased travel.

According to the report, Florida's population has increased by 46% from 2000 to 2024 and is estimated to increase by another 22% by 2050.

TRIP's Director of Policy & Research, Rocky Moretti, said based on current data that by 2045, congestion on rural roadways is expected to increase by 73%.

Moretti added that Florida is also anticipated to see a significant growth in freight movement across the state and that by 2050, the value of the goods will almost double (adjusted for inflation), and 50% increase by weight.

"The reality is we are going to be seeing more trucks on the roads and it's critical that these roadways be improved further so that they can move freight but do it safely and also reliably," Moretti added.

Without many improvements on the rural roadways, it was reported that compared to all other roads and highways across the state, rural non-interstate roads have a significantly higher fatality rate.

"Traffic crashes on Florida's non-Interstate rural roads resulted in 625 fatalities in 2023– 18 percent of all traffic fatalities in Florida," according to Keeping Rural Florida Connected. "While 12 percent of all vehicle travel in Florida in 2023 took place on rural, non-Interstate roads, 18 percent of traffic fatalities occurred on these roads."

According to the report, rural roads are likely to have higher traffic fatalities because they are less likely to have sufficient safety features, compared to urban roads.

Additionally, Moretti added that there has been a 47% increase in the highway construction costs since the beginning of 2022, which has affected the state's ability to expand and improve the rural roadways.

Moretti said that although road construction costs have increased, various cost-effective improvements can be made to help decrease traffic crashes and congestion.

"We've seen from research that rural roadways can be much safer with a variety of improvements, looking at things like making sure the lanes are wide enough, making sure that shoulders are paved, taking care of significant curves and also removing sharp edges along the sides of roadways," Moretti said.

According to the report, good transportation in rural areas is necessary to provide access to jobs, health care, education, recreational activities, social activities and to facilitate the movements of goods and people.

"The rural transportation system is really a vital component of the quality of life and the economic health of rural Florida but really it impacts residents throughout the state," Moretti said.

For more information on the report, Keeping Rural Florida Connected, click [here](#).