



Fixing state's roads and bridges is going to take more money



by [David Brooks](#)
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A pothole filled with water on Woodbine Ave in Concord.
Credit: GEOFF FORESTER / For the Monitor

Traffic is growing but gas-tax income is flat, highway construction costs are soaring, road-damaging weather is getting crazier and the state's payback on a 2015 bond for highway work just rose \$20 million a year.

No wonder 14% of roads in the Merrimack Valley are rated as being in "poor" condition and 8% of its bridges are "deficient."

That's roughly the message of a report just released by TRIP, a think tank funded by the industry and labor groups involved in surface transportation, although the report uses more official language: "Funding constraints will make it challenging to make needed improvements to the state's transportation system that will support a high quality of life and economic growth."

The New Hampshire report is one of a number of state-specific reports released by the nonprofit, partly as a prod to governments to consider increasing fees and taxes to pay for the work. In particular, the federal surface transportation program, which channels much of the federal government's money for roads and highways and

bridges, expires Sept. 30 unless Congress reauthorizes it.

Road and bridge work is paid for by a variety of sources, including gasoline tax (24 cents per gallon for New Hampshire and 18 cents federal, more for diesel); a portion of vehicle registration and large trucks fees; road tolls; and support from general taxes as needed, including at the local level for road agents and public works departments.

In New Hampshire, the legislature is looking to boost revenue from road tolls in a bill passed by the Senate and heading the House. It would raise rates for people with an out-of-state E-Z Pass transponder and is estimated to bring in an extra \$53.3 million next year if it passes, although Gov. Kelly Ayotte is opposed to the bill.

More money is needed. The state's 10-year highway plan, which lists the state's highest-priority needs, will cost an estimated \$400 million over the state's capacity due to inflation. Additionally, 22 projects are being held over from the previous 10-year plan, which also cost more than we had money for.

The report notes other factors squeezing the state's ability to keep roads and bridges in shape. Some are well known, such as a supposed 52% increase in highway construction costs since 2022 due to tariffs and other inflation, and that's before the Iran war raised the cost of petroleum. Revenue from gasoline taxes in New Hampshire are also flat, even though traffic is back up to pre-COVID numbers because of efficient vehicles and a small but growing number of electric cars.

Others factors are more obscure, notably a jump in repayment of a \$200 million low-interest loan to the state in 2015 from the U.S. Department of Transportation, largely for road and bridge repairs in the I-93 corridor. New Hampshire's repayment schedule increased in 2026 from \$2.2 million to \$23.4 million and will remain at this level through 2034, the report said.

The full report can be seen at tripnet.org/