New Hampshire Bulletin

New Hampshire's roads are in poor condition. Will out-of-staters help fund the fix?

By: Molly Rains - April 1, 2026

Poor road conditions cost New Hampshire residents with excess vehicle repairs and time lost to traffic, according to a new report. (Photo by Molly Rains/New Hampshire Bulletin)

A report released Monday by a national transportation research group concluded that keeping New Hampshire's roads and bridges safe would require more work than the state has funds to cover.

One proposed remedy out of the New Hampshire Senate, in the form of a toll fare increase on the 89-mile New Hampshire turnpike system, was heard before the House Committee on Public Works and Highways on Tuesday. The bill, Senate Bill 627, passed the Senate on a voice vote March 5. It would raise rates only for drivers without a New Hampshire E-ZPass transponder.

"We haven't raised a toll since 2007, and this is — it is time, with inflation, with the escalating cost of construction materials and the growth of our economy and our population as well," said Sen. David Watters, the sponsor of the bill and a Dover Democrat, during the Tuesday hearing.

'What other states do to us'

SB 627 proposes raising the minimum turnpike toll rates for drivers paying with cash or with E-ZPass systems from out of state.

The cash payment for a standard two-axle car, which currently ranges from 50 cents to $1, would approximately double for those drivers. Rates for New Hampshire E-ZPass users would remain fixed. The bill also calls for the rates to be reassessed in the future against the inflation of construction costs.

The discussion comes as traffic in the state has returned to pre-pandemic levels and the cost of construction and roadwork has increased by more than half since 2022, according to Rocky Moretti, director of policy and research at TRIP, the nonprofit behind the road condition report.

"This is what other states do to us, all around us," Watters said during a press conference held to discuss the report on Monday.

Factors in the funding shortfall faced by the Department of Transportation, according to Watters, include inflation and the rising cost of construction. Adding to that pressure is declining gas tax revenue. As gas-powered vehicles become more efficient and more drivers convert to electric vehicles, fuel purchasing is down, and thus gas tax revenue is falling too, Watters said.

Meanwhile, the state is paying back a $200 million federal loan from 2015 that was used for improvements along the Interstate 93 corridor. In the thick of the repayment phase, "the spigots have been turned off, but the costs increase," Watters said.

As introduced, the bill increased rates for all drivers with a "frequent customer discount" for New Hampshire E-ZPass users that capped their fees at 40 toll transactions a month. According to Watters, Gov. Kelly Ayotte's office pushed for the amendment to fix rates for New Hampshire residents.

It is normally up to the Governor and Executive Council to set toll rates and approve increases, representatives said at the Tuesday hearing. But this bill would legislate a one-time increase of minimum toll rates, leaving future increases up to the council.

Supporters of the bill who spoke on Tuesday included representatives of the American Council of Engineering Companies, Bow-based Weaver Brothers Construction, Associated General Contractors of New Hampshire, the Strafford Regional Planning Commission, Londonderry-based Continental Paving, and C&J Bus Lines, based in Portsmouth.

"I implore you to support this," said Jim Jalbert, who owns C&J. He said that heavy congestion leads to bus delays, and he wanted to see New Hampshire's road infrastructure maintained.

Amy Charbonneau, of Continental Paving, noted the fee increase would apply to out-of-state trucks headed to New Hampshire's landfills.

Alex Koutroubas, representing Associated General Contractors of New Hampshire, noted that some other states' efforts to raise rates for out-of-state drivers had led to court challenges. But if New Hampshire's law allows any driver, regardless of residence, to purchase a New Hampshire E-ZPass transponder to access the discount, Koutroubas said he believed the law would align with the interstate commerce requirements in the Constitution.

The newly appointed commissioner of the New Hampshire Department of Transportation, David Rodrigue, said the department was neutral on the bill, but urged legislators to be specific about the ability of nonresidents to secure discounted rates by buying a New Hampshire E-ZPass.

The department receives "little to no" state funding, Rodrigue said, and relies on federal funds and turnpike revenue.

"Any increase in tolls would allow us to increase our capital program," he said.

Report: Road conditions cost drivers

Potholes and frost heaves plague roads in the Northeast, especially this time of year, from freeze-thaw cycles that are worsening with climate change. A big picture view of New Hampshire's roads suggests that many are in need of significant surface repairs: About a third of locally and state-maintained roadways have pavement in poor or mediocre condition, according to the TRIP report.

TRIP, based in Washington, D.C., is funded by insurance companies, equipment producers and vendors, labor unions, and other transportation and infrastructure supply chain organizations, according to their website.

At the press conference on Monday, Moretti said their report concluded New Hampshire was "hampered by a lack of adequate resources to proceed with many of these needed projects in a timely fashion." That burden is felt by drivers: Poor road conditions result in an estimated $551 in average excess vehicle maintenance costs for the typical New Hampshire driver, according to the report.

The state's bridges are also suffering: 192 of the 2,549 New Hampshire bridges identified in the report rated in poor or "structurally deficient" condition, meaning they have "significant deterioration of the bridge deck, supports, or other major components," Moretti said.

"Certainly, this doesn't imply that these bridges are in any danger of collapse," he said. But as the structures deteriorate, engineers may lower the maximum weight they are approved to bear — potentially excluding certain trucks from a route, a move that can create its own disruptions.

The report also lists the most-needed transportation infrastructure projects in the state, as identified by the Department of Transportation. Many, from the reconstruction of dangerous turnpike exits on Interstate 293 in Manchester to Moultonborough intersection improvements and Route 3 safety upgrades, have seen needed funding removed from their budgets due to budget constraints, according to the report.

The state's 10-year transportation improvement plan is underfunded by about $400 million, according to the report.

Furthermore, with the return of pre-pandemic traffic levels comes the effects of congestion, Moretti said. In the Merrimack Valley, drivers lose an average of 34 hours each year due to excess traffic congestion, while in the Seacoast, the average driver loses 30 hours, the report states. That equates to about 7 gallons of wasted fuel.

"It's on us. The rubber hits road. Let's get the job done," Watters said on Tuesday.