LARAMIE BOOMERANG

WYDOT outlines strategy to address $600M deficit projections

Noah Zahn Wyoming Tribune Eagle | Apr 24, 2026 Updated Apr 24, 2026

Asphalt overlay operations take place on Interstate 80 near Laramie. WDOT/courtesy

CHEYENNE – As construction costs continue to rise, the Wyoming Department of Transportation is concerned about its funding capacity to maintain safe roads and bridges in the future.

Now, WYDOT has paired with a research nonprofit to strategize how to overcome this funding shortfall and set up a game plan for seeking funds from the Wyoming Legislature.

TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based national transportation research nonprofit, held a meeting Wednesday to discuss its findings.

Founded in 1971, TRIP evaluates economic and technical data on surface transportation issues to promote policies that improve road conditions and safety.

The organization prepared this new report after identifying significant challenges in Wyoming, marking its first major study of the state in more than a decade. The 2026 report examines the condition, use and efficiency of Wyoming's surface transportation system while outlining the 25 highest-priority projects across the state.

Rocky Moretti, TRIP's director of policy and research, said that resources for the actual construction of those projects currently are lacking, adding that since 2022, the state has seen a 52% increase in highway construction costs, which has severely eroded the purchasing power of existing funds.

Grim findings

The report's data highlights areas of concern for WYDOT and Wyoming drivers. Currently, 33% of the state's major roadways are in poor condition. Without a change in funding, that number is projected to climb to 37% by 2028.

The situation for bridges is equally precarious, as 7% are rated in poor or "structurally deficient" condition, showing significant deterioration in decks or supports. Another 64% of bridges are rated in fair condition, requiring immediate maintenance to avoid falling into the "poor" category, where repairs become significantly more expensive.

The report estimates an annual $125 million shortfall specifically for bridge repairs through 2028.

Economic impact

For Wyoming's business community, these findings are more than just statistics. Renny MacKay, president of the Wyoming Business Alliance, said the state's economy literally rides on its roads.

"Our roads are the arteries that connect Wyoming businesses to markets," MacKay said in a news release.

The state's freight system moved $61 billion worth of goods in 2024, a value expected to nearly double by 2050.

MacKay noted that nearly every industry, from energy extraction and mining to tourism and agriculture, relies on a well-maintained network.

Workers make repairs to concrete slabs along Interstate 25 near Cheyenne in June 2020. Wyoming Tribune Eagle/file

At Wednesday's virtual conference, MacKay outlined some of his top concerns listed in the WYDOT list of priorities, including improvements to Interstate 80, new passing lanes on Wyoming Highway 59 in Campbell County, and widening highways like U.S. Highway 287 from Laramie to Colorado and Wyoming Highway 22 from Jackson to Wilson.

Lipstick on a pig

WYDOT Director Darin Westby explained the internal struggle at the agency, saying that WYDOT's revenue streams have remained flat for nearly 20 years, creating an annual shortfall between $400 million and $600 million. This has forced the agency into what he calls "preservation-only mode," where they can only afford to keep surfaces smooth, rather than addressing underlying structural needs.

"We're in that area where we can't keep putting lipstick on that pig and thinking that it's going to last forever," Westby said. "At some point, we need to make good, sound engineering decisions on some of these roads ... we can't keep nickel-and-diming ourselves to complete failure."

A major factor in this crisis is Wyoming's unique funding structure. The state is heavily reliant on federal funds, which account for 70% of its highway revenue and is nearly the exact inverse of the national average of 68% of transportation funding coming from the state.

Wyoming's gasoline and diesel taxes are also the lowest of its six surrounding states.

A menu strategy for funding

The TRIP report identifies 25 high-priority projects that are currently on hold due to a lack of investment. Only three of these top 25 projects have identified construction funding. The list includes:

* The I-80/I-25 interchange in Cheyenne: A $500 million reconstruction project to improve safety and truck movement.
* U.S. 287 widening: A $59 million project from Laramie to the Colorado line to accommodate freight traffic when I-80 closes.
* I-80 improvements: $270 million for truck climbing zones and parking across five counties.

Westby intends to use this list and report as a "menu" to present to the Legislature. By providing clear, secondary research on the cost and safety benefits of these specific projects, WYDOT hopes to secure separate, one-time funding streams or big discretionary federal grants that require state matches.

"By putting somewhat of a menu style like what's in your report ... it really allows us the opportunity to say if these are important to you, you need to fund them," Westby said.

The road ahead

Over the past five years, there have been 769 fatalities on Wyoming roads. TRIP advocates for a "Safe System Approach," which includes roadway features like rumble strips, turn lanes and wider shoulders.

"Implementing these cost-effective and needed roadway safety improvements ... would save approximately 63,700 lives" nationally over 20 years, the report notes.

The conversation will move to the Wyoming Legislature's Joint Transportation Committee on May 4, where the findings of the TRIP report will be formally presented.

For WYDOT and the Wyoming Business Alliance, the goal is sustainable, long-term funding to move Wyoming from a preservation mindset to a mentality of progress.

"Without additional investment, needed transportation projects in Wyoming will be left stranded on the drawing board, and road and bridge conditions will deteriorate," TRIP Executive Director Dave Kearby wrote in a news release.