

Rising costs strain Montana's aging roads and bridges

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The numbers are sobering. According to a [new report released by TRIP](#), a national transportation research group, 31 percent of Montana's major roads are in poor or mediocre condition. The nonprofit says that can lead to hundreds of dollars in vehicle repair costs and increased fuel consumption.

Federal bridge inventory data shows nearly 40 percent of Montana's bridges are more than five decades old. Seven percent of them are rated as poor or structurally deficient.

The service life of bridges can be extended with routine maintenance, but almost all of them will eventually require expensive reconstruction or major rehabilitation.

"One of the challenges faced in Montana, unfortunately, is the challenge we're seeing for transportation agencies across the country, which is that there's been a significant increase in inflation in highway construction," TRIP's Rocky Moretti says.

According to Moretti, highway construction labor and material costs have increased by more than 50 percent since 2002. That, he says, stymies needed projects.

The Federal Surface Transportation Program, one of the largest sources of transportation funding, expires this fall.

Transportation advocates say Congress must renew it with a well-funded program for the country's growing transportation demands.