

Ayotte's transportation plan veto raises questions about effect on NH economy

Long-term highway needs are underfunded, business owners and nonprofit advocates say

By [Paul Briand](#) | July 28, 2026

The state's highway infrastructure is in great need of repair, according to a 2026 independent report that ties the improvements directly to the health of New Hampshire's economy.

Long-term needs are currently underfunded, says TRIP (The Road Information Program), a private, nonprofit organization that researches surface transportation issues across the country.

Compounding the issue, Gov. Kelley Ayotte's recent veto of the state's newest 10-year transportation plan creates uncertainty for future state funding and threatens future federal matching money for infrastructure projects, say stakeholders with an interest in the health of the state's roads, highways and bridges.

"The 10-year plan isn't paperwork. It's how New Hampshire competes for federal matching funds, and the roadmap contractors plan years of work around," said Jim Jalbert, founder of the C&J Bus Lines, which travels more than 1.4 million miles each year on Granite State highways.

In a widely published opinion piece, Jalbert made a note of projects that he described as "stalled for now:" Interstate 93 corridor widening through Concord, long-delayed Interstate 293 exit work in Manchester, bridge reconstruction and a backlog of paving work.

Every two years, per law, the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) proposes a number of projects to address both deficiencies and improvements. The plan is a literal roadmap for which projects to prioritize and fund with state dollars that are often supplemented by federal funding.

Gov. Kelly Ayotte's veto of the latest 10-year highway plan doesn't immediately cancel funding for projects statewide. NHDOT funding for the current fiscal year 2026, which runs through June 30 of next year, totals approximately \$796.3 million, split between operation and projects statewide. Fiscal year 2027 starting July 1, 2027 allocates \$785.7 million.

Several projects are ongoing, such as the replacement of two Route 119 bridges over the Connecticut River between Hinsdale and Brattleboro, Vermont, and the removal of the Hooksett toll booths on Interstate 93.

But this year's 10-year transportation plan was built on a premise that Ayotte couldn't accept: creating more funding by charging higher tolls for those vehicles without a New Hampshire EZ Pass transponder.

"I do not support raising the tolls," Ayotte said in her veto message, aligning it to her commitment to the state's income and sales-tax free status. "I will continue to focus on making New Hampshire more affordable for all and a destination for tourists in the region."

Ayotte took two separate veto actions: rejection of a bipartisan bill (SB 627) that would have raised tolls on vehicles that don't have New Hampshire EZ Pass transponders and rejection of the 2027-2036 Ten Year Transportation Plan that had elements of SB 627 written into it.

Jalbert, noting too that the state tax on gas hasn't changed since 2014, countered that "a destination needs roads that work. Bottlenecked interstates and crumbling bridges don't just cost drivers time — they threaten the tourism and commerce that keep the state's tax-free model solvent in the first place."

Jalbert is highly regarded as a straight up, tell-it-like-it-is-businessman, whose bus line that services Boston's Logan Airport and South Station, along with New York City, operates out of the Pease International Tradeport in Portsmouth.

There are two issues at play here: 1) the aching need for transportation infrastructure improvement and how to pay for it and 2) the veto of a way to get some money that also puts a long-term infrastructure improvement plan in jeopardy.

"Block the narrow revenue streams meant to keep infrastructure current, and eventually you undercut the broader ones that depend on that infrastructure working," Jalbert said.

A [March report](#) from TRIP identified the 25 most needed transportation projects in New Hampshire, many of which lack sufficient funding to proceed.

"Without additional investment, needed transportation projects in New Hampshire will be left stranded on the drawing board and road and bridge conditions will deteriorate," said Dave Kearby, TRIP's executive director in a statement with release of the report.

"A well-maintained and well-funded transportation system is essential to keep New Hampshire residents, visitors and businesses moving in a positive direction," he added.

The study cites traffic congestion as a serious consequence for not only the state's economy but individuals' pocketbooks as well.

It noted that "increasing congestion on New Hampshire's major highways and roads hampers the state's ability to support economic development and quality of life by reducing the reliability and efficiency of personal and commercial travel, including the transport of goods and services."

Merrimack Valley area drivers lose an average of 34 hours per year in traffic congestion costing the average area driver \$561 annually in lost time and wasted fuel, according to the report, while in the Seacoast Region, drivers lose an average of 30 hours per year in traffic congestion costing the average area driver \$604 annually in lost time and wasted fuel.

One of the authors of the rejected transportation plan bill — state Sen. David Watters, D-Dover, — reacted to the TRIP report saying, "I think it really shows the roadway for what we must do to make sure that we have safe, efficient roads that can drive economic opportunity."

"Maintaining a safe, reliable, and efficient transportation system is essential to New Hampshire's economy and quality of life, and the report clearly outlines the challenges the state must address in the Legislature moving forward," Watters added.

He estimates that the toll adjustment would raise an additional \$400 million over the course of the 10-year plan.

"This funding would mean there'd be projects all over the state that really need to get done," Watters said to NHBR. "For me, this is all about jobs and economic development."

State Sen. Mark McConkey, R-Freedom, who advocated strongly for the toll adjustments and helped write the transportation plan legislation with Watters, called the governor's veto "an unprecedented action that creates unnecessary uncertainty for communities, businesses and infrastructure projects across our state."

Watters said he believes there might be enough bipartisan support for the tolls/plan legislation to override the veto. Overturning a veto to make legislation law will require two-thirds votes of both the House and Senate.

No date has been set yet for the Legislature, which finished its 2026 session, to return to take up this veto, which is among nearly 30 others.

"There may well be an override of this. Here we are without a 10-year plan, which is mind-boggling," Watters said.

He pointed to the NHDOT, praising their work, noting, "If you drive our roads and see the quality of work and the tolerances that they insist on, you see what a job they do."

He said he finds it mind-boggling that the governor left the NHDOT without a long-term plan, asking: "What message does it send that they aren't going to be able to do their job?"

Jalbert, too, called on the Legislature to override the veto: "Her own party's leadership has already called the veto short-sighted and unprecedented. An override would put that judgment into law," he said.

If the veto is upheld, Watters expects the Legislature to take the unprecedented action of writing a transportation plan into the next biennial budget.

The state's current two-year budget expires on June 30, 2027, which means that the 2027 Legislative session will have the task of fashioning a new one.

"If we put it in the budget, and if the governor wants to veto that, it's a whole other thing," Watters said.