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One in 10 New Jersey Bridges "Structurally Deficient"

Federal support needed to maintain safety and limit emergency repair costs of New Jersey's 651 deficient bridges

A national report released today shows that New Jersey ranks 26th nationally in terms of the overall condition of the state's bridges, with one being the worst, 51 being the best. [The Fix We're In For 2013](#) finds that drivers in New Jersey are regularly traveling across heavily trafficked bridges rated structurally deficient – bridges that could become dangerous or closed without repair.

The report is the latest update from Transportation for America, which produced a similar report in 2011, based on a national database of bridge inspections maintained by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Advocates from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign responded to the report by calling for New Jersey to increase investment in road and bridge maintenance and repair.

Today, one out of every 10 bridges that motorists in New Jersey cross each day are likely to be deteriorating to some degree; 9.9 percent of bridges statewide are rated "structurally deficient" according to government standards, compared to 11 percent nationwide.

"The safest and most economically viable approach we can take to New Jersey's infrastructure is to protect the investments we've made with needed safety and structural upgrades," said Janna Chernetz, New Jersey Advocate for the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. "Allowing roads and bridges to slip into disrepair ultimately costs state and local governments billions more than the cost of regular, timely repair. Deferring maintenance of bridges and highways can cost three times as much as preventative repairs."

New Jersey's bridge conditions slightly improved since the 2011 report, with the number of deficient bridges falling by 31, from 682 to 651 (out of 6,557 total bridges). Age is a major factor in bridge conditions. While most bridges are designed to last 50 years before major overhaul or replacement, the average age of New Jersey's bridges is 52, and the average age of the state's structurally deficient bridges is 79.

"A prime example of what happens when existing bridge infrastructure is neglected is the Pulaski Skyway," Chernetz said. "In order to complete the necessary repairs in an expedited fashion, the NJDOT is planning to close the Skyway in one direction for 2 years, raising major concerns from local leaders, business owners and residents about the impacts of the closing on the regional economy and the area's quality of life."

Nearly 67,000 bridges nationwide are classified as “structurally deficient.” FHWA estimates that transportation agencies would need \$76 billion to overcome the current backlog of deficient bridges. Without significant federal support, the poor condition of bridges across the country has major implications for safety, mobility and economic activity. American bridges average 43 years old.

Congress has repeatedly declared the condition and safety of our bridges to be of national significance. However, the money to fix them is getting harder to come by with declining gas tax revenues and a fiscal squeeze at all level of government. At the same time, Congress made the prospects for bridges even more uncertain last year by eliminating a dedicated fund for them in its update of the federal transportation program. The new law also reduces access to funds for 90 percent of structurally deficient bridges, most of which are owned by cash-strapped local governments. Now bridges are left to compete with every other priority.

“Preserving New Jersey’s existing transportation system is crucial to ensuring regional prosperity, safety and a higher quality of life,” said James Corless, director of Transportation for America. “The economic and social cost of neglect is simply too high. It is time for our policymakers to shore up our infrastructure and ensure Americans get the most bang for our transportation buck.”

According to the Federal Highway Administration, a structurally deficient bridge is one with “deteriorated conditions of significant bridge elements and potentially reduced load-carrying capacity. A ‘structurally deficient’ designation does not imply that a bridge is unsafe, but such bridges typically require significant maintenance and repair to remain in service.”

The report and an interactive map of deficient bridges is available at <http://t4america.org/resources/bridges/>.

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The Tri-State Transportation Campaign is a non-profit organization working toward a more balanced, transit-friendly and equitable transportation system in Connecticut, New York and New Jersey. www.tstc.org