

Fixing it First

America's infrastructure is showing its age. Our nation's roads, highways and bridges have increasingly received failing scores on maintenance and upkeep. For the nation's bridges, lack of maintenance can result in the sudden closure of a critical transportation link or, far worse, a collapse that results in lost lives and a significant loss in regional economic productivity.

More than 69,000 structurally deficient U.S. bridges span across the federally supported highway system, monuments of our nation's past prosperity and evidence of its misplaced priorities in recent years. Congress needs to declare the repair of these bridges to be an urgent priority, dedicate funding to their repair, and ensure that states are accountable for repairing these vital assets and knocking down the repair backlog. In addition to building shared prosperity for the future, prioritizing bridge repair will add thousands of jobs that our economy needs.

The repair backlog is tremendous. Every minute of every day, an American driver crosses a bridge somewhere in the U.S. that is "structurally deficient" according to government standards. One out of every six bridges in New Hampshire is likely to be deficient, for a total of 372 deficient bridges. An unacceptable 15.4 percent of bridges statewide are rated structurally deficient, compared to 11.5 percent nationwide.

According to 2009 inspection data and costs, New Hampshire would need \$338 million to bring all of our bridges into a state of good repair. By comparison, New Hampshire spent \$17 million total on bridge repair and replacement in 2008. There's a clear need for robust investment in repairing and replacing our bridges.

Out of 50 states and the District of Columbia, New Hampshire ranks 11th worst nationally in terms of the overall condition of the state's bridges (1 being the worst, 51 being the best.)

Prioritizing repair could save billions of dollars in the future while creating thousands of additional jobs today. Past underinvestment in repair and diversion of maintenance funds toward building new highways does more than allow existing roads and bridges to slip into disrepair. It also ultimately costs state and local governments billions more than would the cost of regular, timely repair. Over a 25-year period, deferring maintenance of bridges and highways can cost three times as much as preventative repairs. "Fixing it first" is also a smarter investment for creating jobs: repair work on roads and bridges generates 16 percent more jobs than new bridge and road construction.

Regardless of the amount of wear and tear experienced by a specific bridge, most bridges are designed to last roughly 50 years. The average age of bridges in the U.S. is 42 years old. New Hampshire's bridges are an average of 49.7 years old. Because of this, the number of "structurally deficient" New Hampshire bridges is virtually guaranteed to increase in the coming years as a wave of old bridges reach the end of their designed lives. More than 1,141 New Hampshire bridges are already 50 years old or older.

Preserving New Hampshire's existing transportation system is crucial to ensuring safety, prosperity and a higher quality of life. The economic costs of neglect are simply too high. It is time for our elected leaders to put Americans to work shoring up our infrastructure and ensuring Americans get the most bang for our transportation buck.

New Hampshire Counties, sorted by number of deficient bridges

County	Number of Bridges	Number of structurally deficient bridges	Percent of bridges that are structurally deficient
Hillsborough	359	66	18.40%
Grafton	512	61	11.90%
Merrimack	323	51	15.80%
Rockingham	292	49	16.80%
Cheshire	188	48	25.50%
Strafford	129	25	19.40%
Carroll	171	23	13.50%
Coos	181	19	10.50%
Sullivan	147	18	12.20%
Belknap	106	12	11.30%