

TRIP: Wisconsin rural roads among most deteriorated in U.S. according to new report

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Washington, D.C. – America’s rural transportation system is in need of repairs and modernization to support economic growth in the nation’s Heartland, which is a critical source of energy, food and fiber. With increases in population and growing employment, rural America is heavily reliant on the quality of its transportation system to sustain further growth. This is according to a new report released today by TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit. The report, Rural Connections: Challenges and Opportunities in America’s Heartland, evaluates the safety and condition of the nation’s rural roads and bridges and finds that the nation’s rural transportation system is in need of immediate improvements to address deficient roads and bridges, high crash rates, and inadequate connectivity and capacity. The chart below shows the states with the highest rate of rural pavements in poor condition, states with the highest share of rural bridges that are rated poor/structurally deficient, and states with the highest fatality rates on non-Interstate, rural roads.

The report finds that 19 percent of Wisconsin’s rural roads are rated in poor condition, the 16th highest share in the U.S. Twenty-one percent of the state’s rural roads are in mediocre condition. Eight percent of Wisconsin’s rural bridges are rated as poor/structurally deficient. Bridges that are poor/structurally deficient have

significant deterioration to the major components of the bridge and are often posted for lower weight or closed to traffic, restricting or redirecting large vehicles, including agricultural equipment, commercial trucks, school buses and emergency services vehicles.

“Town roads often provide the critical first and last mile for people, raw materials and finished products to reach their destinations and we are struggling to keep our roads in a state of good repair,” said Betty Manson, clerk of the Town of Plymouth in Juneau County.

The rate of traffic fatalities on Wisconsin’s non-Interstate, rural roads is more than double the fatality rate on all other roads in the state – 1.38 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel vs. 0.63.

“Rural roads play a critical role in supporting the transportation needs of millions of Americans every day,” said Nick Jarmusz, AAA Midwest region director of public affairs. “Damaged and deteriorating roadways too often result in deadly crashes, and it is time to act. Making critical safety improvements to rural roads will save thousands of lives each year and help move our economy forward.”

America’s rural transportation system provides the first and last link in the supply chain from farm to market, connects manufacturers to their customers, supports the tourism industry, and enables the production of energy, food and fiber. Rural Americans are more reliant on the quality of their transportation system than their urban counterparts.

“As a Wisconsin-based manufacturer, our state’s rural roads and bridges are vital to keeping our supply chain and distribution networks moving efficiently,” said Greg Petras, president of Kuhn North America. “Maintaining and modernizing rural infrastructure must be a top priority at the state and federal level because it is essential in keeping the manufacturing and agricultural industries strong, not just in this state, but nationally as well. This report provides a compelling case for why it’s a critical time for both state and federal governments to make a renewed commitment to invest in rural infrastructure.”

The TRIP report finds that the U.S. needs to implement transportation improvements that will improve rural transportation connectivity, safety and conditions to provide the nation’s small communities and rural areas with safe and efficient access to support quality of life and enhance economic productivity.

“Farmers and ranchers depend on rural roads, highways and bridges for daily life and to move their products to market,” said Zippy Duvall, president of the American Farm Bureau Federation. “Securing the appropriate resources at the local, state and federal levels will allow for the improvements needed to provide a rural transportation system that will keep goods moving, American agriculture competitive and rural Americans safe.”

“The health of the nation’s economy and the safety and quality of life in America’s small communities and rural areas ride on our rural transportation system. Our rural roads and bridges provide crucial links from farm to market, move manufactured and energy products, and provide access to countless tourism, social and recreational destinations,” said Will Wilkins, executive director of TRIP. “Fixing the federal Highway Trust Fund with a long-term, sustainable source of revenue that supports the transportation investment needed will be crucial to the modernization of our rural transportation system.”