Saturday/Sunday, Sept. 28-29, 2013: Newspaper changes, crumbling infrastructure and childless adults

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Fix roads, bridges

Current Federal Highway Administration data reveal that a total of 792 (32.9 percent) of Maine's bridges are considered deficient. That deficiency is made up of 356 (14.8 percent) structurally deficient bridges and 436 (18.1 percent) functionally obsolete bridges.

"Keeping Our Bridges Safe," a November 2007 Maine Department of Transportation report, conceded that more than 2,000 of Maine's bridges were in fair or poor condition; 343 (14.4 percent) were structurally deficient, 13th worst nationwide. Maine is currently ninth worst.

Even with the release of the 2011 transportation bond and the governor's $100 million transportation bond awaiting voters, the core highway and bridge programs will suffer an annual $113 million funding shortfall (-32 percent) in the current 2013-15 work plan; an annual $19 million funding shortfall (-18 percent) in bridge improvement projects alone.

The average number of bridge improvement projects per year in the current 2013-15 work plan is 40 (5 percent of current deficient bridges).

The federal TIGER Grant for the final funding piece of the Sarah Mildred Long Bridge replacement was recently denied, leaving the Maine DOT scrambling to find $12.5 million to move forward; TIGER Grant funding was also denied for the $9.4 million Howland-Enfield Bridge replacement.

Simply speaking, we don't have the money to repair our failing infrastructure.

With the sluggish economic recovery and forecasted transportation shortfalls, our limited tax dollars must be spent wisely. Adding more miles to the state's transportation system without adequately maintaining the existing infrastructure doesn't make good fiscal sense.

The $61 million in state and federal funds saved by canceling the Interstate 395-Route 9 connector project would be better spent on the unmet transportation needs of this state.

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