

**News Release: Maine's Rural Roads & Bridges
Have Significant Deficiencies & High Fatality Rates**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, May 12, 2020

Contact:

Rocky Moretti (202) 262-0714

Carolyn Bonifas Kelly (703) 801-9212

MAINE'S RURAL ROADS & BRIDGES HAVE SIGNIFICANT DEFICIENCIES & HIGH FATALITY RATES; ADDRESSING NATION'S ANTICIPATED \$50 BILLION DECREASE IN STATE TRANSPORTATION REVENUES DUE TO COVID-19 SEEN AS VITAL TO FUNDING NEEDED REPAIRS & MODERNIZATION TO IMPROVE RURAL CONDITIONS, SUPPORT ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND BOOST SAFETY

Eds: This report contains data for all 50 states for the percentage of rural roads in poor condition, the percent of deficient rural bridges, rural traffic fatality rates and the number of rural traffic fatalities.

Washington, D.C. –America's rural transportation system is in need of repairs and modernization to support economic growth and improve traffic safety in the nation's Heartland, but the US faces a \$211 billion backlog in funding for needed repairs and improvements to the rural transportation system. 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 America'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 importance of the rural transportation system as the backbone of the nation's energy, food and fiber supply chain has been heightened during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing the nation's rural transportation challenges will require a significant increase in investment, but the tremendous decrease in vehicle travel that has occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic is estimated to reduce state transportation revenues by at least 30 percent – approximately \$50 billion – over the next 18 months.

The chart below ranks states based on their rate of rural pavements in poor condition, share of rural bridges that are rated poor/structurally deficient, and fatality rates on non-Interstate, rural roads.

	State	Rural Pavements in Poor Condition	State	Rural Bridges Poor/Structurally Deficient	State	Fatality Rate per 100M VMT on Rural Non-Interstate Roads	Fatality Rate per 100M VMT on All Other Roads
1	Rhode Island	41%	Rhode Island	22%	South Carolina	3.44	1.12
2	Oklahoma	36%	West Virginia	21%	Oregon	2.92	0.76
3	Hawaii	32%	Iowa	20%	Kentucky	2.55	0.83
4	West Virginia	29%	South Dakota	18%	Tennessee	2.42	0.97
5	New Mexico	28%	Pennsylvania	17%	Arizona	2.36	1.39
6	Arkansas	26%	Louisiana	15%	Rhode Island	2.35	0.61
7	Mississippi	24%	Maine	13%	Kansas	2.31	0.66
8	Connecticut	24%	New York	12%	Oklahoma	2.29	0.95
9	Alaska	23%	Michigan	12%	North Carolina	2.28	0.75
10	Maine	21%	North Dakota	11%	Florida	2.27	1.30
11	California	21%	Oklahoma	11%	Texas	2.26	1.04
12	Washington	21%	North Carolina	11%	New York	2.24	0.49
13	Missouri	21%	Mississippi	9%	California	2.22	0.86
14	New Hampshire	20%	Missouri	9%	South Dakota	2.22	0.52
15	Louisiana	19%	Alaska	9%	Delaware	2.19	0.74
16	Pennsylvania	19%	Nebraska	9%	Alabama	2.16	0.97
17	Vermont	17%	Hawaii	9%	Indiana	2.15	0.65
18	Massachusetts	16%	New Hampshire	9%	West Virginia	2.10	1.15
19	Michigan	16%	South Carolina	9%	Louisiana	2.10	1.33
20	South Carolina	15%	California	9%	Nevada	2.10	1.04
	US AVERAGE	13%	US AVERAGE	8%	US AVERAGE	2.00	0.88

The report finds that Maine's rural roads and bridges have significant deficiencies. **Twenty-one percent of Maine's rural roads are rated in poor condition – the tenth highest rate in the nation– and 21 percent are in mediocre condition. Thirteen percent of Maine's rural bridges are rated in poor/structurally deficient condition, the seventh highest rate in the nation.** Bridges rated 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. There were 112 fatalities on Maine's non-Interstate, rural roads in 2018. The rate of traffic fatalities on Maine's non-Interstate, rural roads is significantly higher than the fatality rate on all other roads in the state – 1.39 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel vs. 0.37. Rural roads are more likely to have narrow lanes, limited shoulders, sharp curves, exposed hazards, pavement drop-offs, steep slopes and limited clear zones along roadsides.

“This report reinforces what many rural Americans already know – **our country's rural infrastructure is crumbling.** The competitiveness of our farmers and ranchers relies on an aging network of roads, bridges, waterways and railways that need an immediate infusion of investment dollars,” said Todd Van Hoose, president and CEO of the Farm Credit Council. “That's why we have partnered with more than 250 national, state and local organizations through the **Rebuild Rural Coalition**. Previous funding opportunities have overlooked our rural infrastructure in the past. We must invest in the transportation network that drives the base of our economy. We must invest in all aspects of rural infrastructure. And we must do it before we lose our competitive advantage.”

“Farmers and ranchers depend on rural roads, highways, and bridges to move their products to market. So does the integrity of our food supply chain,” said Zippy Duvall, president of the **American Farm Bureau Federation**. “Unfortunately, due primarily to lack of investment over several decades, America's infrastructure is in a dire state of rapid deterioration, and recent events show even more the importance of guaranteeing food arrives where it needs to be. Investment in rural infrastructure going forward is paramount to ensure farmers and ranchers can continue to reliably supply the safe and wholesome food Americans need into the future.”

“The transportation construction industry in Maine stands ready to safely continue work on needed projects to improve our roads and bridges and keep our state's economy

moving,” said Maria Fuentes, executive director of the Maine Better Transportation Association. “With reduced traffic counts, these projects can be completed at an accelerated rate while our workers continue to take all necessary precautions to stay safe and keep working, while making needed safety improvements for the traveling public.”

The TRIP report found that America’s rural population, which had declined slightly from 2010 to 2016, has since increased, adding an additional 54,000 people from 2016 to 2018. The modest rebound in rural population is likely a result of increased employment and declining poverty, the report found. The rural poverty rate, which is the percentage of people who are making below the amount of money deemed necessary to have a basic standard of living, decreased from 18.5 percent in 2013 to 16.1 percent in 2018, the TRIP report noted.

“You cannot stock grocery stores, resupply medical facilities and rebuild our economy on the backs of broken roads and aging bridges,” said Stephen E. Sandherr, the chief executive officer of the [Associated General Contractors of America](#). “Without new federal funding, we will miss this unique opportunity, with traffic at record lows, to repair our rural roads, protect countless construction jobs and restart our stalled economy.”

An analysis of the [Status of the Nation’s Highways, Bridges and Transit, 23rd Edition](#), submitted by the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) to Congress in 2019, indicates that the nation’s annual \$28 billion investment by all levels of government in rural road, highway and bridge rehabilitation and enhancements should be increased by 28 percent, to approximately \$36 billion annually, to improve their condition, reliability and safety.

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.

“This report shows infrastructure investment must go beyond our nation’s major cities, and be made in America’s rural communities where our food, fiber, and fuel is produced and much of our equipment is manufactured,” said Dennis Slater, president of the [Association of Equipment Manufacturers](#). “Manufacturers depend on the roads, bridges, and highways in rural America to supply the equipment our economy relies on and that infrastructure is in desperate need of repair and modernization. This is

especially true today as our nation fights the COVID-19 pandemic and hopefully looks to rebuild the economy in the weeks ahead. That's why we need our lawmakers to prioritize policies that support the movement of essential people and goods now more than ever."

Improving and modernizing the nation's rural transportation system will require addressing the significant reduction in state transportation revenues, including motor fuel taxes and tolls, as a result of a significant reduction in travel caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuring that the current federal surface transportation program, which expires on September 30, be reauthorized at funding levels that are adequate and reliable.

"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. The nation's rural roads and bridges already faced a significant funding shortfall, and that will only be exacerbated by the looming reduction in state transportation revenues as a result of decreased vehicle travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic," said Dave Kearby, executive director of TRIP. "The economic recovery from the pandemic could be hastened by significant investments in our nation's transportation system to support job creation while making needed improvements to our roads and bridges that will serve our economy and enhance quality of life for all Americans for decades to come."