

The State of Our Nation's Roads

Half of All Major Roads Are in Less Than Good Condition

Reform of federal transportation financing has led to an improvement in the condition of the nation's roadways, though the nation's street and road networks could have improved even more had a stronger emphasis been placed on repair and rehabilitation. In the last ten years of spending under ISTEA and TEA-21, the percent of major roadways (Interstates, Freeways, Expressways, Principal Arterials, and Minor Arterials in rural areas) in good or better condition grew from about 30 percent in 1994* to about 50 percent in 2001. Interstate highways saw the largest improvement, due mostly to a targeted Interstate Maintenance funding program in the federal transportation law. Nationwide, 33.5 percent of federal highway funds (excluding planning and engineering funding) has been spent on repairing and rehabilitating roads, while 25.2 percent has been spent on the expansion of existing roads, or construction of new roads.

However, despite recent improvements, fully 50 percent of roadway miles remain in less than good condition. And in urban and suburban areas, where most of the population lives and most of the driving occurs, 68.4 percent of roadway miles are in poor, mediocre, or fair condition. This figure is extremely high, especially in light of the more than 40 percent statutory increase in federal funding under TEA-21. While some states have embraced the concept of Fix It First, others have not, instead favoring new highway construction over maintenance and repair of existing streets and roads.

Road Conditions Still Poor

As noted above, half of the nation's roadways, and nearly 70 percent of urban roadways, are in poor,

Nearly 70% of the nation's urban and suburban roads are in less than good condition.

mediocre, or fair condition as of 2001, the most recent year for which data is available. As bad as that sounds, it's nothing compared to what drivers in some states must contend with. The state of Hawaii, with 89.7 percent of its roads in less than good condition, has the worst roads in the nation. Missouri, where 87.5 percent of all roads are in poor, mediocre, or fair condition, is a close second. In Michigan, nearly 90 percent of urban roads are classified as in less than good condition. And in Massachusetts, more than 88 percent of the state's rural roads were found to be in poor, mediocre, or fair condition as of 2001.

Despite a fairly dismal starting point, road conditions in a handful of states actually worsened from 1994 to 2001. In the state of Utah, for example, the portion of roadway miles in poor, mediocre, or fair condition grew by almost 121 percent. In that 8-year period from 1994 to 2001, Californians saw a 25 percent rise in the portion of roadway miles in less than good condition.

States Underspend on Road Repair

When TEA-21 was signed into law in 1998, it

* 1994 was used as a baseline because it was the earliest year for which complete data was available for all but 8 states.

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increased federal highway funds by more than 40 percent. Nationwide, that increase resulted in a corresponding increase in spending on road repair and rehabilitation, so that the share of federal funds obligated on repair and rehabilitation projects held steady at about 33 to 34 percent of federal highway funds (excluding planning and engineering). A closer examination of state-by-state spending patterns, however, reveals tremendous variability among states.

While many states have embraced the concept of Fix It First, some have not, often at the expense of blown tires and damaged shocks. Virginia, for example, spent only 13.4 percent of its federal highway funds (excluding planning and engineering) on road repair and rehabilitation during the ten year period since 1992. This low spending is reflected in the condition of the state's roads. As of 2001, nearly two-thirds of Virginia's roadway miles were found to be in poor, mediocre, or fair condition. Yet despite the obvious need to repair existing roads, the Virginia Department of Transportation instead dedicated almost 41 percent of the state's available federal funding to the construction of new roadway capacity.

Pothole Index

In order to evaluate whether states have made Fix It First a priority, STPP combined the two measures discussed above – roadway conditions and spending on repair and rehabilitation – into a single metric. That metric, the average annual amount spent on road repair and rehabilitation per mile of roadway in poor, mediocre, or fair condition, provides a rough comparison of the states' performance.

The State of Virginia, spending an annual average of just \$11,289 per mile of roadway in

less than good condition, ranks last among the states.* Mississippi comes in a close second to last at less than \$15,000 yearly per mile of roadway in poor, mediocre, or fair condition. With more than 81 percent of its roads classified as in poor, mediocre, or fair condition as of 2001, the state of Oregon is right behind Mississippi, also spending an average of less than \$15,000 annually per mile of roadway in poor, mediocre, or fair condition.

Conclusion

While road conditions have improved since the passage of ISTEA and TEA-21. Interstate highway and bridge conditions in particular improved as a result of targeted funding programs in ISTEA and TEA-21. Yet many states have failed to embrace the concept of Fix It First. TEA-21 provided an influx of new federal highway funding to the states, increasing the total funds available by more than 40 percent. Unfortunately, many states used the new funding to finance new highway construction programs at the expense of repairing existing roadways. As a result, fully half of all roadway miles and nearly 70 percent of urban roadway miles are classified as in less than good condition. When TEA-21 is reauthorized in the upcoming year, legislators should consider new incentives and policies to encourage states to make road repair and rehabilitation a priority. Every state should adopt a Fix It First policy to ensure that the massive investment in the nation's roadways is not wasted. Further, states should be required to distribute funds fairly among urban and suburban, and rural areas. This would help ensure that the roads in our nation's cities, towns, and suburbs – where most of the country lives and drives – are kept in good condition.

Sources:

Federal Highway Administration. *Highway Statistics Series 1997 and 2001*. Table HM-64.
STPP Analysis of FHWA's Fiscal Management Information System (FMIS).

* Out of the 48 states which provided condition data on at least 75 percent of their roadway miles.

For further information, see:

<http://www.transact.org>
<http://www.tea3.org>
<http://www.antc.net>

DRAFT! Please do not distribute!**Table 1. Road Conditions and Spending of Federal Funds on Repair.**

Rank		Percent of Roads Not in Good Condition (1994)	Percent of Roads Not in Good Condition (2001)	Percent of Urban and Suburban Roads Not in Good Condition (2001)	Share of Funds to Road Repair (1992-2001)	Average Yearly Spending on Road Repair (millions)	Average Yearly Spending on Repair per Mile of Roadway Not in Good Condition
1	Virginia	84.3%	66.4%	76.7%	13.4%	\$55.6	\$11,289
2	Mississippi	73.3%	60.7%	71.7%	28.0%	\$64.5	\$14,858
3	Oregon	71.0%	81.2%	88.4%	34.3%	\$76.1	\$14,911
4	Nebraska	72.6%	46.7%	88.1%	39.2%	\$57.0	\$15,745
5	Arkansas	N/A*	75.9%	88.2%	30.4%	\$79.5	\$16,642
6	Colorado	64.8%	54.0%	72.6%	42.4%	\$75.0	\$17,498
7	North Carolina	79.0%	61.5%	65.7%	20.0%	\$90.4	\$18,607
8	South Carolina	50.4%	42.0%	60.0%	21.6%	\$55.9	\$19,662
9	Massachusetts	N/A*	87.4%	86.8%	12.4%	\$57.6	\$19,992
10	Missouri	76.5%	87.5%	91.9%	35.8%	\$155.0	\$20,218
11	South Dakota	78.8%	72.1%	70.9%	73.5%	\$99.4	\$21,233
12	Tennessee	58.8%	31.9%	38.3%	15.9%	\$60.1	\$24,427
13	California	65.5%	81.9%	91.9%	26.4%	\$450.1	\$26,901
14	Utah	26.6%	58.8%	60.5%	43.0%	\$59.7	\$27,994
15	Iowa	70.9%	53.4%	71.8%	55.6%	\$137.2	\$28,950
16	Texas	99.1%	55.9%	77.3%	33.2%	\$421.3	\$29,705
17	West Virginia	N/A*	55.6%	51.1%	22.5%	\$57.2	\$30,466
18	Michigan	57.6%	65.4%	89.7%	39.8%	\$215.4	\$31,943
19	Kentucky	68.8%	43.0%	52.5%	26.1%	\$76.0	\$34,048
20	Washington	94.9%	46.9%	52.8%	26.8%	\$90.0	\$35,562
21	North Dakota	84.3%	43.5%	65.5%	79.4%	\$103.6	\$38,579
22	Vermont	61.0%	51.0%	65.0%	42.6%	\$29.4	\$38,776
23	Illinois	82.4%	56.4%	66.6%	41.2%	\$270.3	\$38,917
24	Wisconsin	59.1%	42.5%	76.4%	56.7%	\$181.2	\$40,276
25	Connecticut	80.4%	79.5%	80.6%	22.3%	\$61.8	\$40,815
26	Pennsylvania	N/A*	64.9%	76.2%	40.7%	\$322.7	\$41,343
27	New York	69.1%	49.6%	74.6%	26.3%	\$221.9	\$41,811
28	New Jersey	N/A*	74.0%	82.3%	23.7%	\$95.4	\$44,082
29	Maine	49.8%	40.6%	56.4%	43.9%	\$44.6	\$45,915
30	Idaho	93.1%	33.9%	62.2%	48.8%	\$60.0	\$46,149
31	Louisiana	69.9%	61.1%	75.9%	46.7%	\$128.7	\$46,584
32	Minnesota	93.1%	29.5%	44.8%	52.6%	\$160.7	\$46,676
33	New Mexico	68.2%	35.3%	69.0%	49.1%	\$93.7	\$51,094
34	Kansas	55.7%	24.1%	66.3%	54.6%	\$109.5	\$51,489
35	Montana	81.5%	26.6%	69.0%	62.6%	\$104.4	\$56,605
36	Hawaii	N/A*	89.7%	89.3%	25.5%	\$33.6	\$57,830
37	Rhode Island	91.3%	82.9%	85.5%	34.5%	\$32.1	\$61,536
38	Maryland	77.0%	45.4%	65.4%	25.2%	\$87.5	\$63,017
39	Alabama	30.7%	24.4%	26.3%	34.3%	\$124.5	\$66,213
40	Indiana	63.3%	37.2%	59.4%	38.0%	\$156.8	\$66,354
41	New Hampshire	40.5%	36.7%	40.4%	43.2%	\$35.5	\$69,926
42	Delaware	76.2%	55.1%	57.4%	33.2%	\$23.4	\$84,612
43	Ohio	31.4%	30.3%	52.7%	39.6%	\$241.7	\$88,385
44	Arizona	39.6%	27.5%	36.2%	39.6%	\$109.2	\$102,376
45	Florida	68.4%	19.3%	27.7%	30.6%	\$220.4	\$104,507
46	Wyoming	94.4%	15.4%	37.5%	71.6%	\$82.4	\$120,988
47	Nevada	43.3%	8.0%	40.0%	28.3%	\$33.2	\$141,420
48	Georgia	N/A*	2.8%	9.8%	18.2%	\$102.5	\$321,394
	Alaska	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*	45.8%	\$87.0	N/A*
	Oklahoma	82.6%	N/A*	N/A*	33.7%	\$90.3	N/A*
	United States	70.1%	49.9%	68.4%	33.5%	\$5,904.6	\$35,128

*State reported on less than 75 percent of roadway miles.