

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 twenty bridges in Washington is likely to be deficient, for a total of 394 deficient bridges. An unacceptable 5.1 percent of bridges statewide are rated structurally deficient.

According to 2009 inspection data and costs, Washington would need \$2.31 billion to bring all of our bridges into a state of good repair. By comparison, Washington spent \$93 million total on bridge repair and replacement in 2008. There's a clear need for robust investment in repairing and replacing our bridges.

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. Washington's bridges are an average of 40.9 years old. Because of this, the number of "structurally deficient" Washington 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 2,534 Washington bridges are already 50 years old or older.

Preserving Washington’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.

Washington Counties, sorted by number of deficient bridges

County	Number of Bridges	Number of structurally deficient bridges	Percent of bridges that are structurally deficient
King	1146	49	4.30%
Snohomish	465	26	5.60%
Kittitas	272	25	9.20%
Yakima	526	25	4.80%
Spokane	277	24	8.70%
Pierce	437	24	5.50%
Adams	189	22	11.60%
Grays Harbor	309	20	6.50%
Whatcom	331	17	5.10%
Whitman	342	15	4.40%
Lewis	361	14	3.90%
Chelan	118	11	9.30%
Clallam	119	11	9.20%
Skagit	229	11	4.80%
Pend Oreille	52	9	17.30%
Klickitat	96	9	9.40%
Mason	116	8	6.90%
Cowlitz	153	8	5.20%
Lincoln	174	8	4.60%
Kitsap	105	7	6.70%
Walla Walla	176	6	3.40%
Ferry	48	5	10.40%
Columbia	87	5	5.70%
Clark	197	5	2.50%
Wahkiakum	34	4	11.80%
Garfield	52	4	7.70%
Pacific	112	4	3.60%
Skamania	85	3	3.50%
Franklin	136	3	2.20%
Okanogan	141	3	2.10%
Benton	164	3	1.80%
Asotin	25	2	8.00%
Jefferson	74	2	2.70%
Douglas	42	1	2.40%

County	Number of Bridges	Number of structurally deficient bridges	Percent of bridges that are structurally deficient
Stevens	70	1	1.40%
Grant	274	0	0.00%
Island	6	0	0.00%
San Juan	12	0	0.00%
Thurston	191	0	0.00%