

The Fix We're In For: The State of Oklahoma's Bridges

TRANSPORTATION FOR AMERICA

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This report was written by Lilly Shoup, Nick Donohue and Marisa Lang with additional contributions from Tanya Mejia, Sean Barry, David Goldberg and Stephen Lee Davis for Transportation for America. Andrew Amey provided invaluable assistance compiling and analyzing the National Bridge Inventory data and Greg Vernon provided the GIS work. Our thanks to the U.S. DOT and FHWA for their cooperation.

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TRANSPORTATION FOR AMERICA (T4 America) is the largest, most diverse coalition working on transportation reform today. We believe it is time for a bold new vision — transportation that guarantees our freedom to move however we choose and leads to a stronger economy, greater energy security, cleaner environment and healthier America. We're calling for more responsible investment of our federal tax dollars to create a safer, cleaner, smarter transportation system that works for everyone.

Contact Us

Transportation for America
1707 L Street NW, Suite 250
Washington, DC 20036
Info@t4america.org
202-955-5543
t4america.org

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America's infrastructure is beginning to show its age. Our nation's roads, highways and bridges have increasingly received failing scores on maintenance and upkeep. The American Society of Civil Engineers has rated our country's overall infrastructure a "D" and our bridges a "C." For roads and highways, this manifests itself in rutted roadways, cracked pavement and abundant potholes, creating significant costs for drivers and businesses due to increased wear and tear on their vehicles. 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.

Despite billions of dollars in annual federal, state and local funds directed toward the maintenance of existing bridges, 69,223 bridges – representing more than 11 percent of total highway bridges – are classified as "structurally deficient," according to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA.) "Structurally deficient" bridges require significant maintenance, rehabilitation or replacement. In addition, a number of bridges exceed their expected lifespan of 50 years. The average age of an American bridge is 42 years.

The maintenance backlog will only worsen as bridges age and costs rise. According to FHWA's 2009 statistics, \$70.9 billion is needed to address the current backlog of deficient bridges.¹ This figure will likely increase as many of our most heavily traveled bridges – including those built more than 40 years ago as part of the Interstate System – near the end of their expected lifespan.

The good news is that some states have worked hard to address the problem and have seen their backlog of deficient bridges shrink in number. The bad news is that, critical as these efforts are, they are not nearly enough. Two key problems persist: (1) An absence of real incentives and assurances at the federal level that fixing aging bridges is a top funding priority; (2) Federal investment in fixing the nation's infrastructure is not currently tied to performance and accountability measures, leaving Americans no concrete assurances of progress. As bridges continue to age and fall into disrepair, our nation's policymakers must make a greater commitment to maintaining and repairing these crucial assets.

Oklahoma's Bridge Backlog

Out of 50 states and the District of Columbia, Oklahoma ranks 2nd nationally in terms of the overall condition of the state's bridges. (1 being the worst, 51 being the best.)

¹ SAFETEA-LU Funding Tables, FY2009, Table 3, Part 1, "Weighted Needs", p.27, <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/safetealu/fy09comptables.pdf>

Today, one out of every five bridges that motorists in Oklahoma cross each day are likely to be deteriorating to some degree; and 22.0 percent of bridges statewide are rated “structurally deficient” according to government standards, compared to 11.5 percent nationwide.

As of 2010, Oklahoma had 23,680 highway bridges: 6,812 of them owned by the state; 15,996 owned by local counties, cities and towns; and 872 owned by other entities, such as private business and federal agencies.² Ownership of a particular bridge matters because it often determines which jurisdiction is responsible for maintenance and repair. Table 1 shows the number and average annual daily traffic³ on Oklahoma's bridges.

What Qualifies a Bridge as “Structurally Deficient?”

Federal law requires states to inspect all bridges 20 feet or longer at least every two years. Bridges in “very good” condition may go four years between inspections, while those rated “structurally deficient” must be inspected every year.

Highway bridges have three components: 1) the **superstructure**, which supports the deck; 2) the **substructure**, which uses the ground to support the superstructure; and 3) the **deck**, which is the top surface of the bridge that cars, trucks and people cross. During inspection, each of these bridge features is given a rating between 0 and 9, with 9 signifying the best condition. Federal guidelines classify bridges as “**structurally deficient**” if one of the three key components is rated at 4 or less (poor or worse), meaning engineers have identified a major defect in its support structure or its deck.¹ If a bridge is rated “structurally deficient,” the bridge requires significant maintenance, rehabilitation or replacement. A state may restrict heavy vehicle traffic, conduct immediate repairs to allow unrestricted use or close the bridge to traffic until repairs can be completed.

Sources: Federal Highway Administration. “Non-Regulatory Supplement.” U.S. Department of Transportation. http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/legsregs/directives/fapg/0650dsup.htm#N_2 Federal Highway Administration. “Conditions & Performance.” U.S. Department of Transportation, 2006.

² In this analysis, we use only highway bridges, since that is all that the National Bridge Inspection Program requires states to report in the National Bridge Inventory. Limited data is available for pedestrian bridges

³ Average amount of traffic that crosses over the bridge each day.

Table 1: Overview of Oklahoma Bridge Statistics

	State system	Local system	Other	Structurally Deficient Bridges	Total
Number of bridges	6,812	15,996	872	5,212	23,680
Bridge average annual daily traffic	51,208,786	9,180,554	7,518,351	7,459,023	67,907,691

Rural bridges often provide crucial access to jobs and medical services for residents in sparsely populated areas. Urban bridges, on the other hand, carry high volumes of traffic to and within regional economic centers. Most bridges in the National Highway System are in rural areas, but urban bridges carry more traffic. Nationally, rural bridges account for 77 percent of all bridges. However, the 23 percent of bridges in urban areas carry almost three-quarters of all national bridge traffic.⁴

Between 1992 and 2010, the number of vehicles traveling across structurally deficient bridges on a daily basis was virtually unchanged (-2 percent), despite billions of dollars spent annually on bridge construction and repair.⁵ An increasing number of American individuals and businesses rely on bridges that are subject to closure or weight restriction if increased maintenance and reconstruction are not undertaken — a potentially crippling impact on personal travel and freight movement.

Drivers in Oklahoma are regularly traveling across heavily trafficked bridges with “poor” ratings — bridges that could become dangerous or closed without repair. Table 2 lists the most heavily used structurally deficient bridges throughout Oklahoma, ranked by average annual daily traffic (ADT) counts.

⁴ Research and Innovative Technology Administration. Highway Bridges in the United States — An Overview. http://www.bts.gov/publications/special_reports_and_issue_briefs/special_report/2007_09_19/html/entire.html

⁵ T4 America's Analysis of FHWA's National Bridge Inventory Data. <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/bridge/britab.cfm>.

Table 2: Oklahoma's Structurally Deficient Bridges with Highest Traffic Volumes

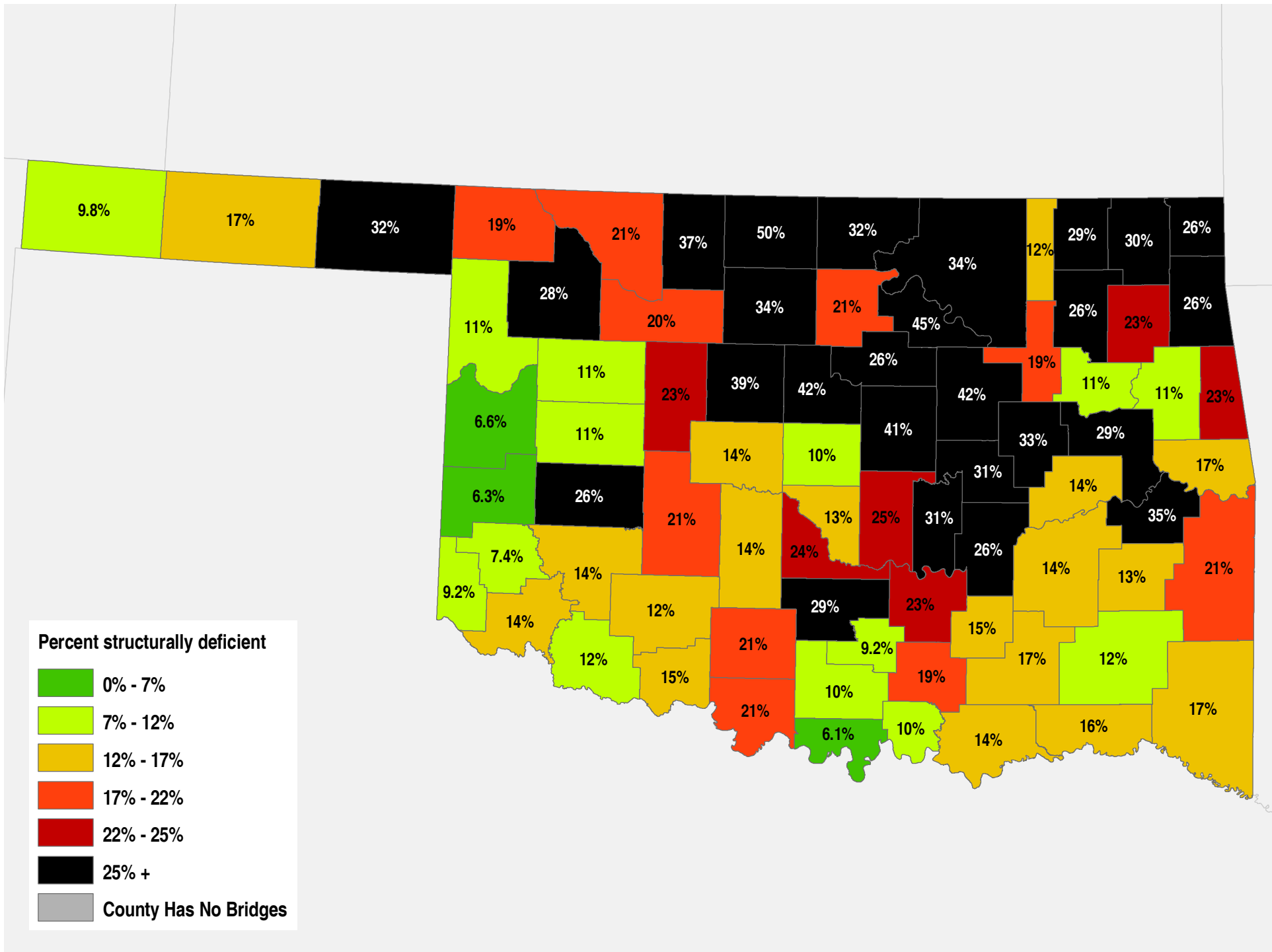
Rank	County	Bridge Facility	Crosses Feature	Proximity to	Average annual daily traffic
1	Oklahoma County*	I-40	FAU 9341 (WESTERN) UNDER	3 MI E OF MAY AVE	106,700
2	Tulsa County	I-244 EB RAMP W-N	I-244 WB UNDER	.10 MI E JCT US 169	83,600
3	Tulsa County	U.S. 64 / S.H. 51	UTICA STREET UNDER	0.8 MI E I-444	77,500
4	Tulsa County	U.S. 64 / S.H. 51	ST LOUIS STREET UNDER	0.7 MI E I-444	77,500
5	Oklahoma County	I-44	PENN. AVE. UNDER	5.11 MI N & E JCT I40	75,800
6	Tulsa County	I-44	PEORIA AVE. UNDER	1.6 MI E JCT US 75	72,400
7	Tulsa County	I-244 RAMP	I-444 UNDER	6.9 MI N I-44	72,000
8	Tulsa County	I-244 E-S RAMP	I-444 UNDER	6.9 MI N I-44	72,000
9	Tulsa County	I-444 RAMP E-N	S.W. BLVD. UNDER	0.1 MI E JCT I-244	70,000
10	Tulsa County	I-244	R.R. & ADMIRAL PL. UNDER	3.62 MI E JCT I 444	67,300

* Local officials indicate that this bridge is currently under construction.

Oklahoma has 32 out of 77 counties where the average bridge condition is worse than the statewide average. Table 3 reveals the five counties with the best and worst average bridge conditions. In Figure A, counties are shaded based on their overall percentage of “structurally deficient” bridges. Although smaller or more rural counties have fewer bridges than more populated counties, this measurement allows for cross-comparison between counties of various sizes.

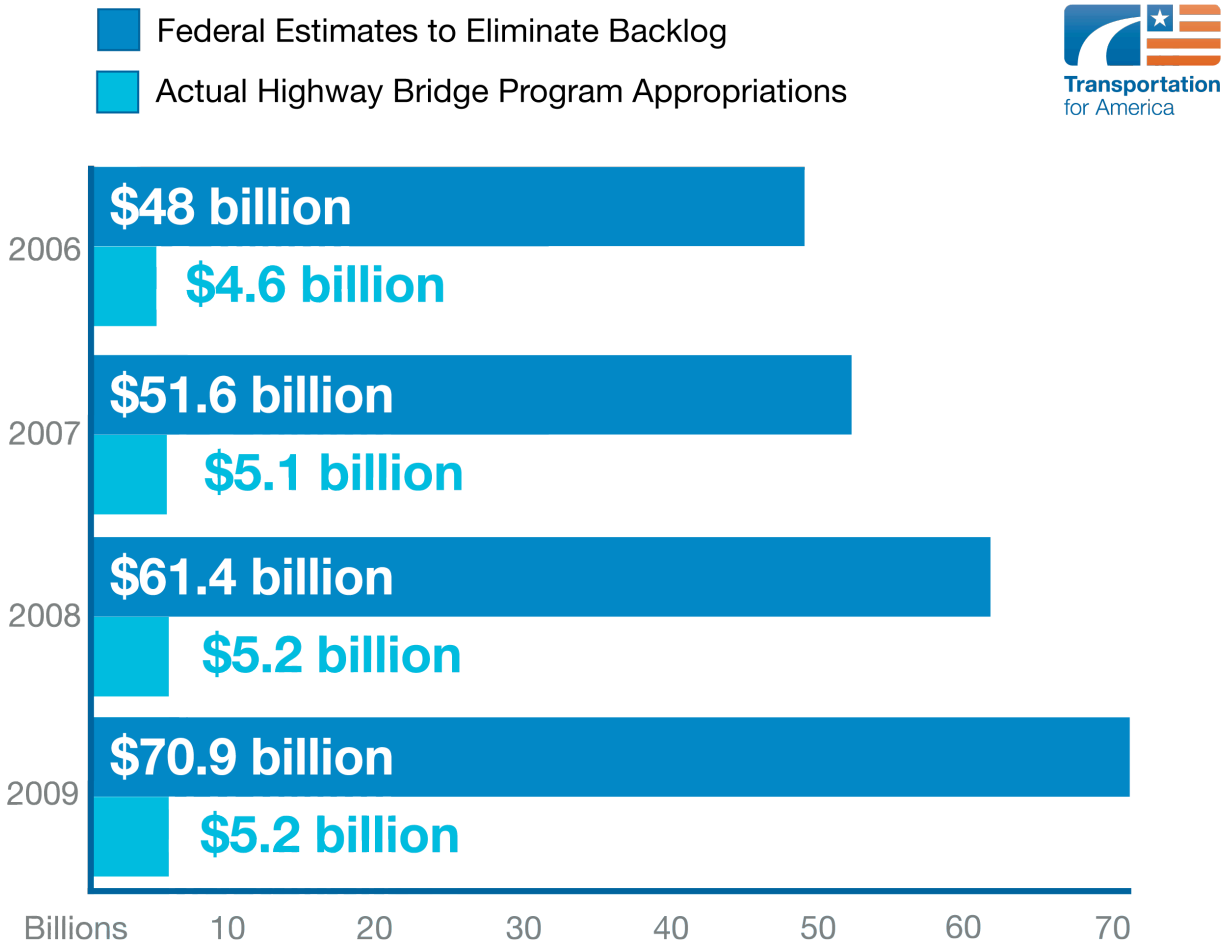
Table 3: Counties in Oklahoma With Best and Worst Average Bridge Conditions

County	# of Highway Bridges	# of Structurally Deficient Bridges	% Structurally Deficient
Grant County	516	260	50.4%
Pawnee County	195	88	45.1%
Logan County	313	131	41.9%
Creek County	423	177	41.8%
Lincoln County	511	209	40.9%
Murray County	120	11	9.2%
Greer County	231	17	7.4%
Roger Mills County	152	10	6.6%
Beckham County	320	20	6.3%
Love County	131	8	6.1%



Congress created the Federal Highway Bridge Program to fix and replace deficient bridges throughout the country, yet current funding is insufficient to keep up with the rapid deterioration rate of U.S. bridges. Figure B compares the size of the bridge program from 2006 through 2009 with FHWA estimates of the sums needed to catch up on the current backlog of repairs. While appropriations have increased by \$650 million, bridge needs over the same time period have increased by \$22.8 billion.

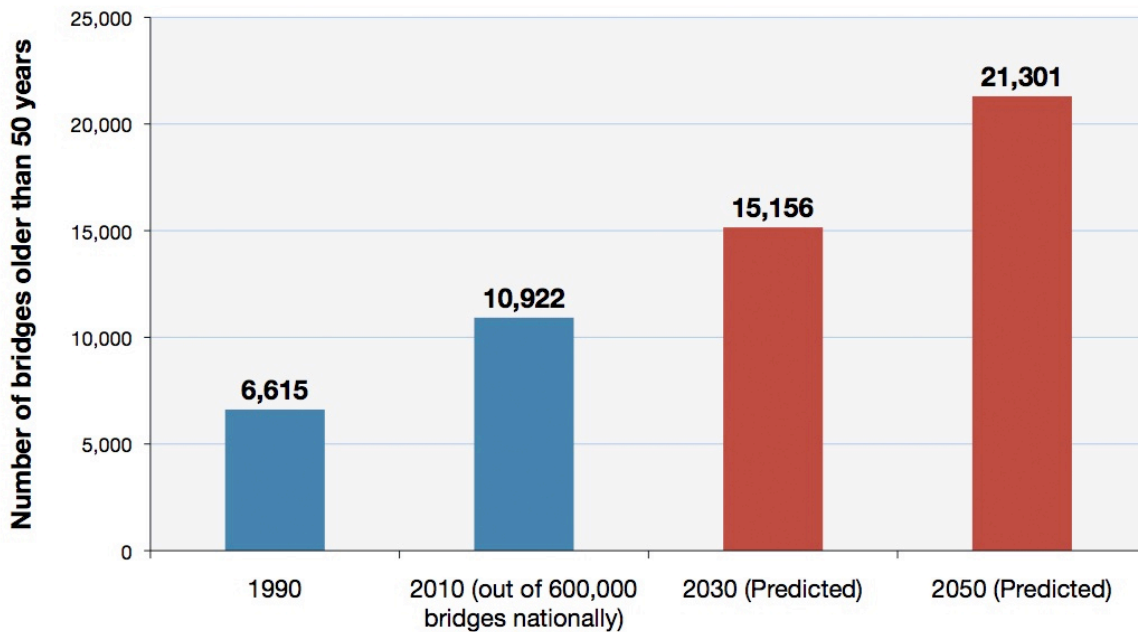
Figure B: Bridge Repair Funding Levels Versus FHWA Needs Estimate



The Cost of Aging Bridges

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. Oklahoma's average is 44.6 years old. The number of "structurally deficient" bridges is virtually guaranteed to increase over time, as a wave of old bridges reach the end of their designed lives. Nationally, more than 185,000 highway bridges (out of 600,000 total) are now 50 years old or older. By 2030, that number could double without substantial bridge replacement, and it has the potential to triple by 2050. With one in five bridges built over 50 years ago, almost half of all the nation's bridges may require major structural investments within the next 15 years.⁶

Figure C: Oklahoma Bridges over 50 Years Old



⁶ *Bridging the Gap: Restoring and Rebuilding the Nation's Bridges*. American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. July 2008. <http://roughroads.transportation.org/>

Oklahoma's Response to I-35W

Engineers for the Oklahoma Department of Transportation are conducting a design review of 95 bridges on state highways to ensure they comply with new safety standards. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued new safety standards following the 2007 Minnesota Interstate 35 bridge collapse.

Many of the bridges included in the review were built between 1924 and 1965 with a design resembling the Minnesota's bridge. These Oklahoma bridges utilize a truss system, which includes a structure comprised of one or more triangular units with connecting ends. The truss was the focus of the FHWA's regulatory overview.

ODOT's initial review of 30 bridges resulted in temporary closure for two and weight restrictions for 25. Six of those bridges now have a weight limit of 15 tons, which is equivalent to the weight of a school bus at full capacity. The weight limits, while crucial to preventing further damage and ensuring safety, are a problem for a modern, connected transportation network, posing significant challenges for buses, trucks and other large vehicles.

Overall, Oklahoma has 1,400 bridges out of 6,700 total that are unable to support the weight they were initially designed to carry. However, compared to other states, Oklahoma faces a smaller cost burden and requires more modest fixes to bring its bridges into a state of good repair. The state has made significant progress in overall maintenance and repair since 2000.

Source: NewsOK

<http://www.newsok.com/article/3472119?pid=52616e646f6d4956f07ded497a827937b2758462b16313ff>

The Tension Between Fixing the Old and Building the New

Under the existing federal program, transportation agencies have tended to delay needed repairs and preventive maintenance by directing funds toward new construction. In 2008, all states combined spent more than \$18 billion, or 30 percent of federal transportation funds, to build new roads or add capacity to existing roads. In that same year, states spent \$8.1 billion of federal funds on repair and rehabilitation of bridges, or about 13 percent of total funds. In 2008, Oklahoma spent \$134 million, or 19.0 percent of total federal funds, on bridge upkeep.⁷ Though we need to continue expanding our transportation system, the safety and preservation of existing bridges and roads must be a higher priority for our long-term economic competitiveness and fiscal sustainability.

⁷ Ibid.

States Can't Keep Up Without Federal Support

Bridges provide crucial access between regions and cities, linking workers to jobs, goods to markets and people to essential services. According to the FHWA, transportation agencies would need \$70.9 billion to overcome the current backlog of deficient bridges.⁸ This investment would be money well spent, as poor bridge conditions have major implications for traveler safety, mobility and economic activity.

Allowing roads and bridges to slip into disrepair ultimately costs state and local governments billions more than 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. The backlog also increases safety risks, hinders economic prosperity and significantly burdens taxpayers. Preservation efforts can also extend the expected service life of a road for an additional 18 years, preventing the need for major reconstruction or replacement.⁹ It is imperative that Oklahoma maximize precious tax dollars by extending the useful service life of roads and bridges before major rehabilitation or replacement is required.

⁸ SAFETEA-LU Funding Tables, FY2009, Table 3, Part 1, "Weighted Needs", p.27.
<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/safetealu/fy09comptables.pdf>

⁹ American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. *Bridging the Gap: Restoring and Rebuilding the Nation's Bridges*. July 2008. <http://roughroads.transportation.org/>

The Consequences of Deferred Maintenance

Neglecting bridge repair and maintenance won't just cost more money down the road — the consequences can be far more immediate and disastrous. Deferred maintenance can result in crippling delays if a vital artery is closed, or even worse, if lives are put in danger as aging bridges become unsafe and at risk for collapse.

Crown Point Bridge Closing

On October 16, 2009, the Champlain/Crown Point bridge linking New York and Vermont was closed without warning. An inspection performed on the bridge as part of a rehabilitation or replacement process, set to start in 2012, revealed that two of the bridge's support piers were not structurally sound. The bridge was a vital economic connection between the states, carrying about 3,500 cars across each day. Thousands of daily commuters now have to drive about 100 miles out of their way to another bridge or pay at least \$8 a trip for a ferry. A month later, officials in Vermont and New York announced that the bridge was beyond repair and would have to be demolished. Jim Bonnie, with the New York Department of Transportation, told NPR, "We set aside about \$30 million a year for our bridge program, but we need on the order of \$100 million to maintain our 830 bridges. So, it's just an epidemic."

Minneapolis' I-35W Collapse

On August 1, 2007, the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis, Minnesota abruptly failed, falling into the Mississippi River, killing 13 people and injuring 145. Following the incident, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) undertook a year-long investigation to determine the cause of the collapse. Though the "structurally deficient" bridge was being inspected every year, the NTSB found that the bridge design was flawed; its gusset plates were undersized and not meant to support the kind of loads the bridge was carrying. The cause of the collapse, in the NTSB's opinion, was the increased weight of the bridge itself due to previous modifications, and the concentrated weight of construction materials present on the deck of the bridge on the day of the collapse.

In addition to the safety imperative, investing in the construction, expansion and repair of our nation's transportation infrastructure creates jobs while laying the foundation for long-term economic prosperity. Repair work on roads and bridges generates 16 percent more jobs than new bridge and road construction.¹⁰

¹⁰ Smart Growth for America. *The Best Stimulus for The Money*. www.smartgrowthamerica.org/stimulus.html

For all these reasons, Congress repeatedly has declared the condition and safety of our bridges to be of national significance. However, the current federal program is not designed to ensure that transportation agencies have enough money and accountability to get the job done.

Recommendations

As our nation's bridges continue to age Congress needs to provide states with increased resources to repair and rebuild them. As the chart earlier in this report shows, the federal transportation program currently provides only a fraction of the necessary funds for maintenance and repair. Although a number of states are making repair of existing assets a priority, more support from the federal government is essential. The nation's bridges are aging and traffic demands are increasing. Though the size of the federal program has increased by 14 percent between 2006 and 2009, state-level needs increased by 47 percent.

Congress also needs to take steps to make sure that funds sent to states for bridge repair are used only for that purpose. Today states can transfer bridge funds for other purposes – even if they have bridges that are in need of repair. These funds should only be used for other purposes if the state's bridges are in a state of good repair. In addition, states should be given the flexibility to develop long-term programs that focus on both keeping bridges in good condition and fixing or replacing bridges that are deficient. Even in instances where it is more cost-effective to perform regular repair on a bridge to prevent it from becoming deficient, the current federal program only allows states to fix a bridge that is structurally deficient with a low sufficiency rating.

Some states across the country are already taking the right steps to repair their infrastructure. These best practices could serve as a model for other states and work with an improved federal program to fix our nation's bridges. Michigan, for example, has greatly increased the ratio of spending on routine maintenance and pavement preservation vis-à-vis capacity increases and/or new roads by attempting to meet a goal of 95 percent of freeways and 85 percent of non-freeways in good condition by 2007, a goal established by Michigan's State Transportation Commission in 1997. The Florida Department of Transportation is bound by state statute that lists preservation as the first of three "prevailing principles," and sets maintenance standards for pavement and bridges.

When our aging bridges are replaced, they must be designed to provide safe access for all who need to use them, whether they are in vehicles, on foot or bicycle, or using public transit.

Conclusion

We cannot continue to ignore our transportation network's vital maintenance needs. The costs of current practices are well known, as roads and bridges continue to display the effects of wear and age, suffering the results of underinvestment. Without a change in both spending levels and overall priorities, Oklahoma will need \$480 from each driver to fix all of the structurally deficient bridges. As our bridges continue to age – more than 60 percent of all bridges will be past their useful life in 2030 – this figure will only grow.

Preserving Oklahoma's existing transportation system is crucial to ensuring regional prosperity, safety and a higher quality of life. The economic and social cost of neglect is simply too high. It is time for our policymakers to shore up our infrastructure and ensure Americans get the most bang for our transportation buck.

Appendix A: Oklahoma Counties, Ranked by Percentage of Structurally Deficient Bridges

County	Number of bridges	Number of structurally deficient bridges	Percentage of bridges that are structurally deficient	Bridge average annual daily traffic	Average annual daily traffic on SD bridges
Grant County	516	260	50.40%	97,703	30,957
Pawnee County	195	88	45.10%	264,057	45,567
Logan County	313	131	41.90%	395,934	38,640
Creek County	423	177	41.80%	1,382,703	77,707
Lincoln County	511	209	40.90%	814,903	56,679
Kingfisher County	339	131	38.60%	156,839	23,281
Alfalfa County	401	149	37.20%	96,429	26,609
Haskell County	155	55	35.50%	133,135	21,590
Garfield County	586	202	34.50%	459,548	40,255
Osage County	364	125	34.30%	297,605	50,893
Okmulgee County	319	106	33.20%	650,775	94,635
Kay County	416	134	32.20%	563,115	119,794
Beaver County	222	71	32.00%	107,928	8,412

County	Number of bridges	Number of structurally deficient bridges	Percentage of bridges that are structurally deficient	Bridge average annual daily traffic	Average annual daily traffic on SD bridges
Seminole County	338	106	31.40%	453,970	74,903
Okfuskee County	228	70	30.70%	304,755	42,850
Craig County	181	55	30.40%	454,455	42,303
Muskogee County	395	116	29.40%	1,280,813	75,595
Garvin County	410	120	29.30%	662,212	102,339
Nowata County	123	36	29.30%	108,976	20,674
Woodward County	201	57	28.40%	236,542	20,115
Payne County	400	105	26.30%	683,598	55,475
Ottawa County	266	69	25.90%	828,028	100,748
Delaware County	162	42	25.90%	258,486	25,057
Hughes County	223	57	25.60%	161,038	17,288
Rogers County	270	69	25.60%	1,473,494	304,045
Washita County	450	115	25.60%	262,593	14,395
Pottawatomie County	486	120	24.70%	1,119,959	92,032
McClain County	263	63	24.00%	1,126,034	111,250
Mayes County	227	53	23.30%	716,180	62,312
Adair County	142	33	23.20%	148,269	14,830
Blaine County	293	68	23.20%	104,387	10,293
Pontotoc County	266	60	22.60%	334,924	44,334
Le Flore County	480	102	21.30%	765,357	40,026
Jefferson County	151	32	21.20%	92,534	13,951
Stephens County	400	83	20.80%	382,164	14,759
Caddo County	479	99	20.70%	575,939	30,933
Woods County	325	67	20.60%	77,888	13,362
Noble County	345	71	20.60%	547,013	39,262

County	Number of bridges	Number of structurally deficient bridges	Percentage of bridges that are structurally deficient	Bridge average annual daily traffic	Average annual daily traffic on SD bridges
Major County	275	55	20.00%	126,876	19,955
Johnston County	154	29	18.80%	100,768	17,813
Tulsa County	1031	191	18.50%	16,390,817	3,215,846
Harper County	135	25	18.50%	76,099	4,648
Sequoyah County	265	45	17.00%	1,055,590	72,264
Atoka County	254	43	16.90%	394,510	8,401
McCurtain County	270	45	16.70%	331,709	34,044
Texas County	121	20	16.50%	101,185	9,230
Choctaw County	229	37	16.20%	184,932	8,182
Coal County	147	22	15.00%	116,568	8,174
Cotton County	219	32	14.60%	233,488	6,138
Jackson County	309	44	14.20%	174,634	2,488
Bryan County	274	39	14.20%	560,878	24,990
Pittsburg County	422	60	14.20%	798,216	43,124
McIntosh County	204	29	14.20%	563,352	69,953
Kiowa County	476	67	14.10%	177,963	20,410
Canadian County	457	63	13.80%	1,489,270	152,070
Grady County	474	64	13.50%	794,485	24,387
Latimer County	193	26	13.50%	150,060	9,827
Cleveland County	301	39	13.00%	2,180,420	91,534
Washington County	206	25	12.10%	403,392	34,630
Comanche County	564	68	12.10%	1,636,883	30,471
Pushmataha County	242	29	12.00%	196,366	8,937
Tillman County	294	35	11.90%	100,995	1,326
Custer County	416	47	11.30%	600,802	2,844

County	Number of bridges	Number of structurally deficient bridges	Percentage of bridges that are structurally deficient	Bridge average annual daily traffic	Average annual daily traffic on SD bridges
Ellis County	153	17	11.10%	76,164	4,340
Wagoner County	244	27	11.10%	917,986	20,734
Dewey County	177	19	10.70%	64,319	3,277
Cherokee County	200	21	10.50%	349,973	22,040
Marshall County	77	8	10.40%	94,840	5,490
Carter County	334	34	10.20%	881,472	49,379
Oklahoma County	1144	116	10.10%	16,470,455	1,383,396
Cimarron County	92	9	9.80%	62,632	1,069
Harmon County	109	10	9.20%	31,604	880
Murray County	120	11	9.20%	349,436	1,894
Greer County	231	17	7.40%	45,912	1,146
Roger Mills County	152	10	6.60%	53,774	5,810
Beckham County	320	20	6.30%	554,170	12,207
Love County	131	8	6.10%	434,414	7,525