



MIXED NEWS FOR PENNSYLVANIA HIGHWAYS

By Lauren Jessop,
The Center Square Contributor

Congestion, structurally deficient bridges and pavement conditions are key factors contributing to Pennsylvania's low ranking among the nation's highways, a new report says.

There is, however, a mixture of both good and bad news for the commonwealth.

Despite ranking in the bottom 26 percent, it was one of only 21 states to make progress, albeit slightly, moving from 41st last year to 37th overall.

The Reason Foundation's 28th Annual Highway Report evaluates the condition and cost-effectiveness of state-controlled highways across 13 categories. The data used in the report primarily comes from information each state submitted to the Federal Highway Administration for 2022, the most recent year with complete data available.

The state's most significant improvements from the previous report were 'other disbursements,' rising from 43rd to 33rd, and 'other fatality rate' went

from 35th to 25th. Additionally, the rural fatality rate ranked 12th while the urban fatality rate stood at 20th.

Although ranking 17th in capital and bridge disbursements — the costs of building new roads and bridges and widening existing ones — it came in 31st and 37th for administrative disbursements and maintenance spending respectively.

Ranking for the state's bridges also improved slightly.

Baruch Feigenbaum, lead author of the report, and senior managing director of transportation policy at Reason Foundation told The Center Square that Pennsylvania's 45th ranking in this category might not seem very good, but it used to be 50th.

The ranking has potential for more improvement in the next report, as PennDOT has reported repairing or replacing more than 200 bridges between 2023 and 2024. In 2024, the Shapiro administration had 300 bridge projects underway.

Congestion is Pennsylvania's next lowest ranking, and the one with the most significant decline — from 32nd to 42nd.

(Continued on page 48)

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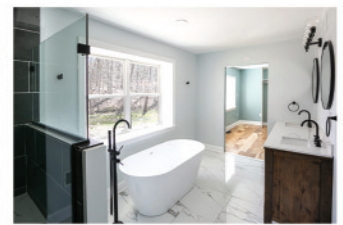
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PENNSYLVANIA HIGHWAYS

(Continued from page 47)

Feigenbaum said that after bridges, it's a matter of working on traffic congestion, pavement, and perhaps developing a quantitative cost benefit analysis tool which helps prioritize projects. States like Virginia and North Carolina tend to rank significantly higher because they're doing the projects that are the most needed, he said.

He noted Pennsylvania ranked in the 30s in all four pavement condition categories:

- 39th in urban Interstate pavement
- 37th in rural Interstate pavement
- 37th in urban arterial pavement
- 31st in rural arterial pavement

Georgia is ranked 6th overall, with its lowest ranking being 14 in the four pavement categories. Feigenbaum noted that Georgia has a specialized unit overseeing pavement contractors. Through various strategies — including incentives to complete work quickly — they consistently finish their projects in under a year, making it a good model for other states to consider.

He also said improving mass transportation would help — something

the Shapiro administration hopes to address with increased funding in his 2025-26 budget and beyond.

Overall, compared to similarly populated states, the commonwealth ranks ahead of 45th-ranked New York, but worse than Illinois at 36th.

Terrain, climate, truck volumes, urbanization, system age, budget priorities, unit cost differences, state budget circumstances, and management/maintenance philosophies are factors that affect the report's overall performance.

Similar to last year, the report says, the top-performing states are a mix of large and small, and urban and rural. Five states with large populations of more than seven million people placed in the top 10 overall rankings.

North Carolina is the No. 1 state, followed by South Carolina, North Dakota, Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, Minnesota, Utah, Missouri, and Ohio.

The 10 lowest-ranked states are Delaware, Rhode Island, Colorado, Vermont, New York, Louisiana, Washington, Hawaii, California, with Alaska finishing at the bottom and ranked 50th.