

The Post-Standard

No high marks for roads in CNY

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Staff writer

At least a third of the Syracuse area's most heavily traveled highways are in substandard condition, and half of the bridges that carry thousands of cars each day are in need of repair or replacement, according to a study.

The Road Information Program or TRIP, a national nonprofit transportation research group based in Washington, D.C., also said the traffic fatality rate in the Syracuse area is higher than the state and national averages.

The group's report, sponsored by insurance companies, highway contractors, labor unions and engineering firms, is based on state and federal highway data, census material and safety records.

TRIP gave the Syracuse area a C- for road conditions, a D+ for traffic safety and a D for bridge conditions.

Other areas of the state received similar marks in report cards released Wednesday.

Jennifer Post, speaking for the state Department of Transportation, disagreed with TRIP's assessment.

"New York state highways are safer than ever, and in the last decade conditions of roads and bridges have improved markedly," Post said.

She said at least \$270 million in highway and bridge improvements have been made in DOT's Syracuse region during the past five years.

The Syracuse region includes Onondaga, Oswego, Seneca, Cayuga, Tompkins and Cortland counties.

Post said the improvements have included \$127 million on pavement and \$120 million on bridges "as well as other funding for safety and mobility improvements."

"Roads that are good or excellent increased from 54 percent to 66 percent, and 73 percent of state-owned bridges are in good or excellent condition, compared to 69 percent in 1995," she said.

The organization's report, which is a compilation of data collected by state and federal transportation departments, said the Syracuse traffic fatality rate was 8.69 traffic deaths per 100,000 people. The state urban fatality rate is 5.15 fatalities per 100,000 people, and the national rate is 8.0 fatalities per 100,000.

Frank Moretti, director of policy and research for TRIP, said the organization's main focus is public education and what needs to be done to improve public safety.

"We don't want to be alarmists. The bridges in question aren't going to collapse, or the state would have closed them. But we're saying these things need attention," Moretti said.

The president and chief executive officer of the state chapter of the Associated General Contractors said the report shows the state's infrastructure is failing.

"Without bold leadership and a substantial and sustainable funding plan, the poor grades given out in this report will slide further down the alphabet," said A.J. Castelbuono.

Kathy Carroll, chair of the government relations committee of the Greater Syracuse Chamber of Commerce, said a substantial increase in spending is needed for an ongoing repair program.

"We need a boost of federal and state funds for these projects," said Carroll, building manager for Covanta Energy Corp., which operates the Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency's trash incinerator in Onondaga.