

Local News

C A P I T A L R E G I O N :

Roads, bridges said needing repairs

DOT spokeswoman says the TRIP report is 'flawed'

BY KATHY PARKER Gazette Reporter

More than half of the roads in Schenectady, Albany and Southern Saratoga counties are in substandard condition and a significant number of bridges need replacement or repair, according to TRIP, a national transportation research group.

TRIP, based in Washington, D.C., is funded by insurance companies, equipment manufacturers and suppliers, construction-related businesses and labor unions.

TRIP said it studied traffic, road and bridge conditions around New York and concluded more state and federal money should be spent to make improvements.

But a spokeswoman for the state Department of Transportation called the report "flawed" and said state inspections find roads and bridges are in better shape than they were 10 years ago.

"New York state conducts annual inspections and finds 66 percent of roads are in good or excellent condition compared to 54 percent in 1995," said Jennifer Post. "Bridges in good or excellent condition are at 73 percent which is up from 69 percent 10 years ago."

She said the so-called TRIP report took into consideration local and county roads for which the state is not responsible.

The TRIP report assigned letter grades, from A to F, to roadways and bridges with high traffic numbers. The average grade in the region was a D for roads and a Cminus for bridges.

The research group released statistics for many metropolitan areas around the state Wednesday, and Long Island, Tarrytown, and Rochester each received "F" averages for roadways.

Locally, 30 percent of the major roads were rated in poor condition and another 21 percent were rated mediocre.

State-owned roads cited in the report as needing immediate reconstruction

were: Route 146 in Niskayuna from River Road to the Saratoga County line; Route 67 in Saratoga County from Northway Exit 12 in Malta to Route 50 in Ballston Spa; Route 5 in Albany from the Colonie town line to Everett Road; Route 155 From U.S. 20 to Route 5 in Guilderland and Colonie ; Route 9W in Bethlehem, and Glenridge Road in Glenville and Clifton Park.

Other roads in need of attention, according to the report, were: Route 5 in Scotia from Route 147 to Washington Avenue; Route 7 from I-890 to Union Street in Schenectady and Niskayuna ; I-890 from I-90 Exit 26 to Exit 2A in Rotterdam and Schenectady ; and Route 85 in Albany from the Thruway overpass to I-90.

The oldest bridge in need of replacement, according to the report, is the Route 50 bridge over the Indian Kill in Glenville that was constructed in

1928 and carries 13,800 cars and trucks a day. Also in need of replacement in Glenville, the Glenridge Road Bridge over the Alplaus Kill, which was built in 1935 and has 11,800 vehicles travelling over it daily.

Frank Moretti, who represents the research group founded in 1971, said the average daily commute in New York is now more than 31 minutes

and annual car repairs related to poor road conditions are topping \$400.

"Every dollar spent on street and highway improvements results in \$5.40 in benefits in improved traffic safety, reduced travel delays and reduced vehicle operating costs," Moretti said.

He said his group constantly updates its information.

"Our goal is to educate the public and our reports are helpful to legislators making the decisions about transportation," said Moretti. He said until the 1990s, roads were kept in generally good condition.

"In the past few years, state funding has been dropping and we're seeing conditions get worse and worse as travel is increasing," he said.

The president of the Associated General Contractors of New York said the tax-paying public is being robbed as fees increase, but less money is being spent to assure safe roads.

"Less than 10 percent of the so-called dedicated fund for highways and bridges is actually being spent on repairs," said A.J. Castlebuono.

He said the state collects \$3.4 billion a year in user fees and \$1 billion of that is spent on debt service.

Post said she did not have details of how the trust fund is spent.

"But, debt service is a serious concern in our financing," she said. The money in the Dedicated Highway and Bridge Trust Fund is collected through gas taxes, tolls, and Department of Motor Vehicle fees.

Castlebuono said, "[The fund] is being robbed of \$1 billion a year that is being placed in the general fund of the state. It's subsidizing the Metropolitan Transit Authority to the tune of \$800 million a year and another \$500 million goes for snow plowing, bus inspections and to the DMV."

Post said the state last year spent \$409 million in road and bridge repairs and improvements aimed at safety and mobility in the Capital Region.

She said the state defines the area as Albany, Schenectady, Greene, Saratoga, Washington, Warren and Essex Counties.