

Cracks in the Public Structures

Vermont's Bridges are Going Nowhere Good

Failing or closed bridges have come to symbolize our deteriorating public structures. They are the inevitable result of trying to balance a budget with cuts alone.

Vermont has now closed 16 bridges to all traffic. Eleven more are closed for the short term, with a temporary bridge in place until the original structure is rehabilitated. And there are restrictions—such as reduced weight, speed, or vehicle height—on 100 other bridges throughout the state.

The Structures Section of the Vermont Agency of Transportation is responsible for the design, inspection, and management of the states' bridges as well as its culverts, rail structures, and large overhead signs and retaining walls.

According to the section's [2010 Annual Report](#), Vermont has pushed off bridge repairs for so long that it would be unable to clear the backlog at current spending levels.

“Decades of deferred maintenance has pushed structure needs above annual funding levels,” and that is likely to mean higher costs in the long run, the report said. “Without adequate attention, many bridges will require replacement, restriction, or closure long before their desired lifespan is complete,” the report continued. “This will only further stress Vermont's limited transportation resources, restrict Vermonters' mobility, and negatively affect the state's overall economy.”

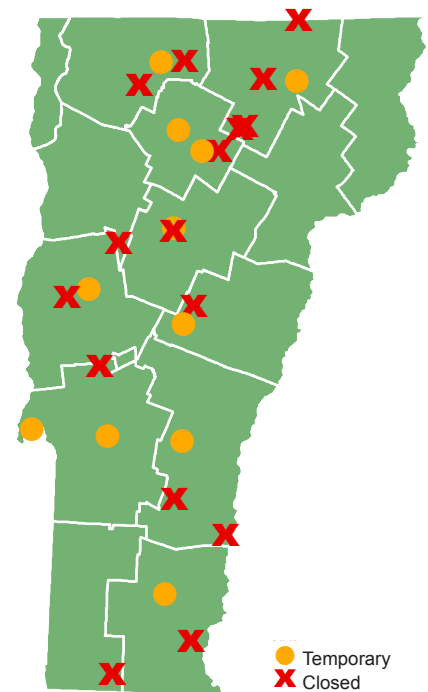
Problems with funding for highway and bridge maintenance have been building for years. Some of the major revenue sources that support the transportation budget have not been growing as fast as the cost of repairing and replacing the aging bridges. The gasoline tax, for example, is based on the number of gallons of fuel sold, not on the price. As Vermonters have moved to more efficient cars or cut back on their driving in recent years, gasoline tax receipts have declined.

Vermont can't begin to catch up on the backlog of deteriorating bridges until it addresses its revenue problem. The state must fund the transportation budget from sources that will grow at the same pace as the cost of repairs.

Source: Vermont Agency of Transportation

Can't Get There From Here

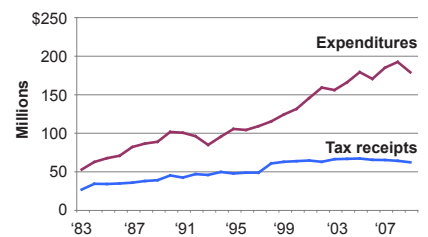
Closed and temporary bridges in Vermont as of Feb. 10, 2010.



Data source: Vermont Agency of Transportation

Gas Tax Not Keeping Pace

Gasoline tax receipts and Transportation Fund expenditures, FY1983 - 2009



Data source: Joint Fiscal Office