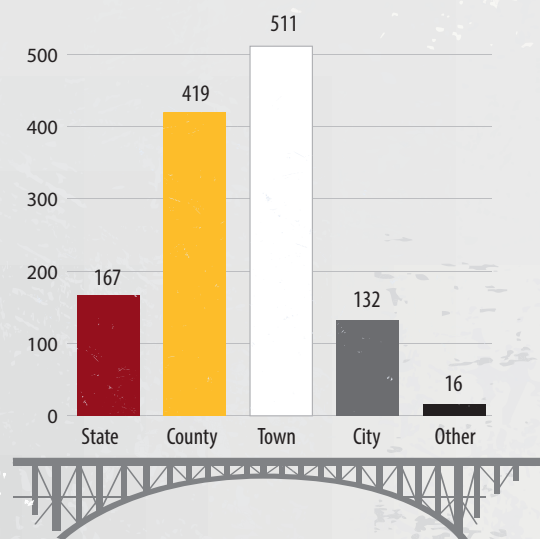




Wisconsin's Bridges: Not a Win-Win Scenario

Local bridge funding had been declining for almost a decade, and demand for the Local Bridge Improvement Assistance Program exceeded available revenue in each of the past two award cycles (\$34.6 million, \$66.2 million).

1,245 Structurally Deficient Bridges in Wisconsin (9% of total bridges)



Source: Federal Highway Administration 2017 National Bridge Inventory Data

So, it is great news that all the projects submitted to the program in the 2018-22 cycle were approved.

Deteriorating bridges are often weight posted to prevent loads that cause stresses above the safe limit from crossing. This protects the public and prolongs the life of the bridge until it can be replaced or repaired.

But, this can mean many additional miles for farmers and commercial haulers, putting more wear and tear on local roadways.

Not There Yet

Unfortunately, there are more local bridges that need to be repaired or replaced.

Take Marathon County for example. The county highway department is responsible for monitoring and maintaining almost 50 structurally deficient bridges, three times the average for Wisconsin counties. They submitted and received approval for 7 bridges in the latest cycle.

Where did the money come from?

The money to fund all the bridges submitted came from a \$20 million increase to the program's biennial budget and a one-time infusion of funds made possible by the receipt of additional money from the federal government (\$38.6 million).

Historically, state and federal money has covered 80% of a bridge replacement, while local governments picked up the remaining 20%. With the state's new replace-in-kind policy, which only funds state-mandated

minimum standards, more of the costs will be shifted to local governments. Many of these local governments will have to borrow or reduce spending elsewhere to find the necessary match.



The Other Side of the Story

There are 14,253 bridges in Wisconsin. About 40% are owned by the state with the rest owned primarily by local governments. While there are more local bridges, state bridges carry significantly more traffic and commerce.

Top Five Most-Traveled Structurally Deficient Bridges

County	Year Built	Daily Crossings	Type of Bridge	Location
Milwaukee	1960	124,000	Urban Interstate	IH 43-N-S Freeway over Lrd Glendale Ave
St. Croix	1972	73,000	Urban Interstate	IH 94-USH 12-Sth 3 over Lrd Front St
St. Croix	1972	73,000	Urban Interstate	IH 94-USH 12-Sth 3 over Sth 35 SB
Milwaukee	1967	50,000	Urban Interstate	IH 41/Ush 45/Sth 1 over Lrd W Mill Rd
Milwaukee	1967	50,000	Urban Interstate	IH 41/Ush 45/Sth 1 over Lrd W Mill Rd

Source: 2018 ARTBA Bridge Report, Highlights from FHWA's 2017 National Bridge Inventory Data

As part of its most recent annual submittal of bridge inventory data to the Federal Highway Administration, the state identified 2,809 bridges in need of repair or replacement with an estimated cost of \$2.6 billion. Approximately 60% of the cost is related to state-owned bridges.

In Southeast Wisconsin alone, almost 400 bridges are approaching the end of their useful lives and will need to be rehabilitated or replaced over the next 20 years at a cost of nearly \$1 billion. These bridges will need to be addressed regardless of the timing of the overall southeast freeway modernization program.

The Highway Improvement Program was cut significantly in the 2017–19 budget and is at the lowest level in over a decade. Without a long-term plan to address the state's aging bridges, expect traffic disruptions and “throw away” costs. And there may be little warning, such as what happened with the Zoo Interchange in 2009.

A Case of Either/Or

Needs across Wisconsin's transportation system far exceed available revenue, even with some unanticipated federal funds. As a result, an increase in one program means something else is not getting done.

The Legislative Fiscal Bureau put it this way in its memo to the Joint Committee on Finance about potential uses of the additional federal revenue:

“Given these demands on both state transportation infrastructure and the limited state resources currently available to meet those needs, one policy concern that the Committee may want to consider in reviewing this request is whether the state can afford to again increase funding for a local bridge improvement assistance program at a time when the state is having difficulty funding the state's transportation infrastructure needs.”



Zoo Interchange bridges need immediate replacement, inspectors say

By Tom Held of the Journal Sentinel
Published on: 11/19/2009

Three bridges in the Zoo Interchange have reached such dire condition that the state Department of Transportation acted Thursday to replace them, in what could be a weekend barn-raising fashion, before Memorial Day.

As envisioned by state engineers, sections of pre-constructed replacement spans, upwards of 200 feet long, would be moved into place rapidly to avoid months-long road closings required for traditional demolition and reconstruction work.

Use of the accelerated construction approach would be a first in Wisconsin.

DOT officials estimate the rapid replacement will cost roughly \$12 million to \$22 million.

And the new bridges will be torn out and replaced again, during a reconstruction of the entire interchange, now projected to begin around 2014 to 2016.

<http://archive.jsonline.com/news/milwaukee/70541002.html>