



California Statewide Local Streets & Roads Needs Assessment 2021

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Background

The local street, road, and bridge system holds California’s entire transportation network together. From the moment we open our front door and drive to work, bike to school, or walk to the bus stop, we depend on safe, reliable roads, bridges, and essential street components. Police, fire, and emergency medical services need safe, reliable roads to react quickly to calls – delay can be a matter of life and death. Further, California’s economy relies upon an efficient, multi-modal transportation network to safely move people and goods.

Local streets and roads make up over 85% of the roadway network in California. There are 12,339 local bridges, making up 48% of all the bridges in California. Conservatively, this network is valued at over \$220 billion. Nearly all public and active transportation modes, including buses, bicycles, and walking, require access to the local system.

Problem

For decades, transportation funding needs have far outpaced available revenues. This is not only a problem in California– it’s a national crisis. At the federal level, gasoline taxes have not kept pace with inflation and rising construction costs. Until recently, the same was true for the state’s gasoline taxes. This is coupled with the trend towards more fuel efficient and electric vehicles. These vehicles provide important environmental benefits, but until 2017, dedicated state road maintenance funding relied almost exclusively on fuel taxes.

Aging infrastructure, rising construction costs, and new regulatory requirements have all contributed to a significant funding shortfall. Other factors, such as heavier vehicles, increasing traffic, and the need to accommodate transit, bicyclists, and pedestrians, have put increased demands on the transportation infrastructure.

California Takes Action

In April 2017, the California State Legislature and Governor Jerry Brown heeded the call and reached agreement on a robust, bipartisan, long-term, and multi-modal transportation funding solution to help close the funding gap and repair and improve the state’s transportation system. Senate Bill (SB) 1 – the Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017 – generates over \$5 billion annually for state highways and bridges, local streets and roads, transit systems, active transportation, and key freight and trade corridors.

Cities and counties receive an average of \$1.5 billion in flexible funding annually; this means \$15 billion over the next 10 years in additional revenue for local agencies to maintain and repair streets and roads, rehabilitate or replace aging bridges, and address safety issues.

Purpose

The 2020 Report is a comprehensive statewide assessment of the local road and bridge network. The purpose is to inform the public and policymakers at all levels of government about the infrastructure investments needed to provide California with a seamless, safe, and efficient multi-modal transportation system.

FACT SHEET



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Findings

The most significant finding of the 2020 Report is that SB 1 has accomplished its first goal: it has arrested the historical deterioration of the local transportation network. The average condition of local pavements statewide has improved slightly from 65 to 66, as measured according to the Pavement Condition Index (a scale of zero [failed] to 100 [excellent]). SB 1 has also enabled cities and counties to make life-saving safety improvements; expand pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access and safety; and reduce the overall maintenance funding shortfall.

Despite the significant increase in flexible local road maintenance funding from SB 1, dedicated funding for local bridge rehabilitation and replacement projects in California has been flat since 2009. California's local bridges are deteriorating rapidly, with 4,401 bridges in need of repair and 451 in need of replacement. Almost a fifth of these bridges are over 80 years old. At current funding levels, local bridges will need to be in service for more than 200 years, or 3 times their intended lifespan.

Finally, while the initial increase in statewide PCI is promising and provides evidence that local agencies are prioritizing fix-it-first investments with new SB 1 funding, the longer-term picture is less clear. The 2020 Report estimates the needs of the local transportation infrastructure at \$118.7 billion over the next 10 years. With SB 1, the available funding is \$54.7 billion, resulting in a shortfall of \$64 billion. Uncertainty surrounding the attempt to repeal SB 1 in late 2018 may have affected the industry response to the increased availability of funding. Based on projects completed in the 2020 fiscal year, local agencies reported significantly higher bid prices in the 2020 survey than in prior years.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant transportation revenue reductions for cities and counties in 2020 and 2021. The pandemic also undoubtedly had impacts on bid prices and project delivery at the local level. These impacts, as well as the ongoing effect of additional funding from SB 1, will be further analyzed in the 2022 Report.

Recommendations

First, the state and local agencies must maintain all existing sources of revenue, with a primary focus on fix-it-first investments to preserve the existing road network. Once the system is in a state of good repair, the need for maintenance will be reduced.

Second, the state and local agencies must identify and pursue opportunities, including increased federal infrastructure funding, to bolster investment in the rehabilitation and replacement of California's locally owned bridges. Many of these projects are too costly for local agencies to fund on their own, but the benefits of safe and well-maintained bridges warrant dedicated statewide funding.

Who should I contact for more information?

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