

BRIDGE CONDITIONS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

New Hampshire’s bridges form key links in the state’s highway system, providing communities and individuals access to employment, schools, shopping and medical facilities, and facilitating commerce and access for emergency vehicles.

Nine percent (215 of 2,514) of New Hampshire’s locally and state-maintained bridges are rated in poor/structurally deficient condition.ⁱ This includes all bridges that are 20 feet or more in length. A bridge is deemed structurally deficient if there is significant deterioration of the bridge deck, supports or other major components.

Bridges that are structurally deficient may be posted for lower weight limits or closed if their condition warrants such action. Deteriorated bridges can have a significant impact on daily life. Restrictions on vehicle weight may cause many vehicles – especially emergency vehicles, commercial trucks, school buses and farm equipment – to use alternate routes to avoid posted bridges. Redirected trips also lengthen travel time, waste fuel and reduce the efficiency of the local economy.

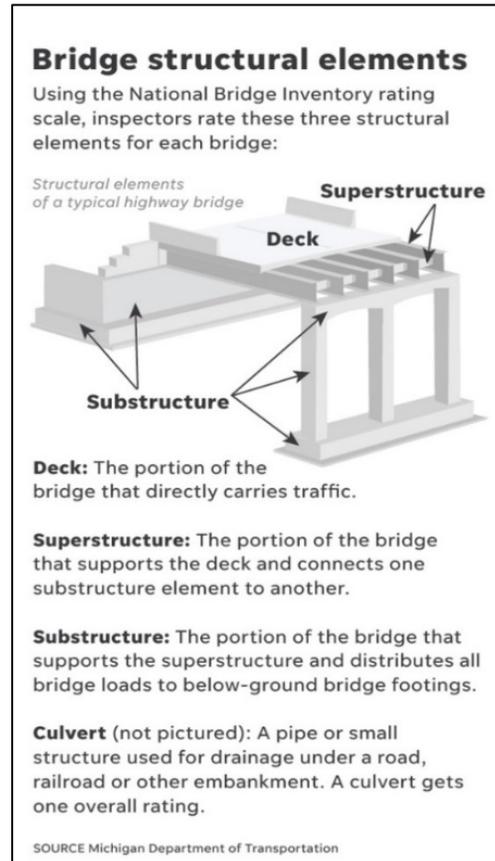
Thirty-nine percent of New Hampshire’s locally and state-maintained bridges have been rated in fair condition.ⁱⁱ A fair rating indicates that a bridge’s structural elements are sound but minor deterioration has occurred to the bridge’s deck, substructure or superstructure. The remaining 53 percent of the state’s bridges are rated in good condition.ⁱⁱⁱ

The chart below details the condition of bridges statewide and in each New Hampshire county.

Chart 4. Bridge conditions statewide and in each New Hampshire county.

	Poor/Structurally Deficient		Fair		Good		Total Bridges
	Number	Share	Number	Share	Number	Share	
Belknap	7	6%	43	40%	58	54%	108
Carroll	19	10%	72	38%	99	52%	190
Cheshire	22	12%	87	46%	80	42%	189
Coos	13	7%	76	41%	97	52%	186
Grafton	38	7%	229	42%	273	51%	540
Hillsborough	38	10%	140	37%	204	53%	382
Merrimack	31	10%	145	45%	149	46%	325
Rockingham	26	9%	75	25%	204	67%	305
Strafford	12	9%	35	26%	86	65%	133
Sullivan	9	6%	69	44%	78	50%	156
NEW HAMPSHIRE	215	9%	971	39%	1,328	53%	2,514

Source: TRIP analysis of Federal Highway Administration National Bridge Inventory (2020).



Most bridges are designed to last 50 years before major overhaul or replacement, although many newer bridges are being designed to last 75 years or longer. In New Hampshire, 55 percent of the state's bridges were built in 1969 or earlier.^{iv}

The service life of bridges can be extended by performing routine maintenance such as resurfacing decks, painting surfaces, ensuring that a facility has good drainage and replacing deteriorating components. But most bridges will eventually require more costly reconstruction or major rehabilitation to remain operable.

ⁱ Federal Highway Administration National Bridge Inventory. 2020.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} TRIP analysis of Federal Highway Administration National Bridge Inventory data (2020).