

N.J. road conditions / Another dubious honor

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Add this to New Jersey's list of dubious achievements: It has the worst roads in the nation.

That's the assessment of Transportation for America, a Washington lobbying group that uses data compiled by the Federal Highway Administration to come up with a state-by-state ranking of how rough the ride is on state and county roads. The national average for roads in poor condition was 5.8 percent. But 28 percent of New Jersey's roads were rated as poor - by far the worst in the nation. The closest competitors: Hawaii, at 22.8 percent, and California, at 17.2 percent.

Some factors to consider: New Jersey is a crowded corridor state in a heavily-trafficked stretch of the Northeast. So its roads take a pounding. And the state's roads must also endure winter weather and the freeze-thaw cycles that cause potholes and other damage.

Still, that's no excuse. Massachusetts ranked among the top five states, with a mere 1 percent of roads rated poor. That state is not exactly balmy or unpopulated.

Why the bottom-of-the-barrel ranking?

Maybe part of it is connected to the fact that the state has refused to properly fund the Transportation Trust Fund, which pays for much of the state's road improvements.

The federal infusion of [stimulus](#) money is allowing New Jersey to get some roadwork done now. But that stimulus money will be fleeting. And the Transportation Trust Fund - after a short-term fix three years ago that involved [refinancing](#) and more borrowing - will run out of funding again next year. After that point, all of the money raised by gas taxes will go toward [debt](#) payments on previously borrowed money.

There is a reason the state's toll roads get favorable ratings from AAA polls while state and county roads are rated in far worse condition: The toll roads have a straightforward way to pay for road repairs.

We have long advocated a gas-tax increase as the fairest, best way to underwrite road repairs and transportation improvements. But weak-kneed politicians have, for decades, ignored recommendations from from blue-ribbon panels and other experts and refused to raise this tax.

Unless something is done soon, the deplorable condition of New Jersey's roads will get even worse.

And this is yet another example of the serious, important issues that *aren't* getting discussed by the two major candidates in the gubernatorial race. It is, unfortunately, a growing list.

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