It’s been just over a year since the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) gave the nation’s infrastructure an overall grade of D+ in its once-every-four-years Infrastructure Report Card. Recent months have brought plenty of new evidence of the challenges states face in bringing that grade up but also some positive signs that progress can be and is being made.

State Infrastructure Reports

- **California**: Joseph Kane of Brookings reports this month on how water utilities in the Bay Area are working closely with one another and with various community groups to tackle challenges like water scarcity and affordability head on—with a particular emphasis on workforce development.

- **District of Columbia**: Speaking of workforce development, the District has partnered with utility companies, unions, universities and private companies on a training program to prepare workers for infrastructure jobs in fields such as transportation and green technology, WTOP Radio reported this week. In 2017, nearly half of D.C.’s infrastructure jobs went unfilled. The program, known as the DC Infrastructure Academy, received funding from the city’s capital budget and from a $5.2 million contribution to workforce development programs that energy utility Pepco provided as part of a merger with Exelon.

- **Florida**: Multiple casualties are reported as a result of a pedestrian bridge collapse today at Florida International University in Miami, CNN reported. The bridge, which cost $14.2 million to build, was installed only Saturday. It was funded as part of a $19.4 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation. A team from the National Transportation Safety Board was reported to be on its way to Miami to investigate the collapse.

- **Hawaii**: New weight limit restrictions for bridges on the islands of Hawaii, Maui, Oahu and Kauai are being implemented after state transportation officials recalculated the impact of heavy truck loads, The Star-Advertiser reported.

- **Idaho**: In addition to the national Infrastructure Report Card, ASCE and its partners have also produced state report cards over the years, including one recently issued for the state of Idaho. The state received an overall “C-” grade for roads, bridges, dams and other structures. Bridges received a “D” grade.

- **Kentucky**: A report this month from the national transportation research group TRIP finds that Kentucky “roadway features are likely a contributing factor in approximately one-third of fatal traffic crashes” and the commonwealth could improve its higher-than-average roadway crash record by investing in projects to widen lanes and shoulders and upgrade road geometry. Kentucky lawmakers are considering a proposal this session, HB 609, to raise motor fuel taxes in order to generate $300 million a year more for transportation.

- **Maine**: Back in November, TRIP issued a report on the condition and funding needs of Maine’s aging bridge system. According to the report, 14 percent of the state’s state-and-locally maintained bridges are structurally deficient, the ninth highest rate in the nation. A significant number of the state’s bridges have surpassed or are approaching 50 years old, typically the intended design life. The report estimates the replacement cost of Maine’s state-maintained bridges is $8.2 billion.

- **Michigan**: The Los Angeles Times reported this week on the prevalence of potholes on the
streets of Fraser, a city near Detroit, and how the area is hoping President Trump’s proposed infrastructure plan can make a difference. But there is also fear that the plan will fall short of what the state needs or fail to gain traction at all in Washington this year. A report this month from the ASCE’s Michigan Section [13] gave the state’s roads the grade of “D-.” Despite 2015 legislation that increased fuel taxes and registration fees, state observers are concerned that policymakers have yet to find a long-term solution to the state’s infrastructure needs, MLive reported [14].

- **New Mexico:** The Land of Enchantment also gets the TRIP treatment in another recent report [15], which notes that despite a nearly $384 million construction and maintenance budget, the state faces a $506 million shortfall to fund needed projects. Moreover, costs related to road congestion cost New Mexico drivers $690 million each year.

- **Pennsylvania:** The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported [16] last month that despite efforts to “chisel away” at the number of structurally deficient bridges in the commonwealth (notably the Rapid Bridge Replacement Project, a public-private partnership that is replacing 558 bridges over 3 and ½ years), Pennsylvania still has the second most of those in the country.

- **Rhode Island:** The Rhode Island Department of Transportation announced this week [17] that they’re shutting down a bridge in Providence which was deemed to be structurally deficient. Rehabilitation of the Bath Street East Bridge was included in the department’s 10-year plan. Work on the bridge will now be accelerated, starting in 2019, RIDOT said.

**TIGER Grants**

The U.S. Department of Transportation [18] this month announced nearly $500 million in discretionary grant funding under the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) program. Forty-one projects in 43 states received funding this year. The department notes that rural projects were awarded more than 64 percent of the total funding in this round of TIGER. Tribal projects [19] will receive $39.18 million, the highest amount they’ve received since the first round of the program in 2009.

Among the projects receiving funding: the replacement [20] of three structurally deficient bridges in Maine, the rehab of three rail bridges [21] in Arkansas, a project to improve safety [22] on a stretch of I-57 in Illinois near the town of Marion, a project at the Port of Mobile [23] to aid Alabama’s automotive industry, the construction of a new expressway [24] in Lincoln, Nebraska, a project [25] to improve pedestrian safety and mobility as well as commercial and business access in Carson City, Nevada, a plan [26] to separate trucks from other traffic on State Route 189 in Arizona, and a project [27] that will allow the Rhode Island DOT to replace 15 bridges and culverts and improve traffic bottlenecks.

But some noted that this year’s funded projects appeared to reflect the changing priorities the Trump administration has brought to the Obama-era program. Angie Schmitt of Streetsblog USA [28] wrote that “while a few strong projects for walking, biking, and transit did receive funds, the overall list is a major departure from the multi-modal priorities of the Obama years. … Only 3.8 percent of the funds will support transit projects, and another 18 percent will go toward walking and biking improvements, while nearly 60 percent will go toward highways and bridges.”

American Public Transportation Association President and CEO Paul Skoutelas weighed in as well [29], saying: “This represents a significant decrease in public transit TIGER grants. While we appreciate the fact that two of the 41 FY 2017 TIGER awards will go to public transit projects in Georgia and Wisconsin, APTA notes that more than 20 percent of funding awards during the previous three fiscal years went to public transportation. APTA urges the Administration to increase funding for public transit investments in future years.” The two transit projects to receive grants included a bus rapid transit project [30] in Atlanta and a project to revitalize a transit transfer center in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. A downtown streetcar line extension in Milwaukee was among the transit projects that did not receive [31] TIGER funding.
But other modes felt short-changed as well. Kurt Nagle, the President of the American Association of Port Authorities, in a press release called for ports to receive more TIGER funding, citing their role in moving freight and supporting the economy. Five of the 41 TIGER grants announced were port-related. More than 40 port applications were submitted for this round of funding. “While we’re pleased there were a few port-related projects included in the ninth round of TIGER grants just announced, we’re disappointed there weren’t more,” Nagle said.

But the future of the TIGER program as a whole also continues to be in doubt. President Trump has proposed ending the program in each of his last two budget requests. Despite that, Congress has continued to budget for the popular program, which since 2009 has helped many communities fund significant infrastructure projects around the country.

Further Reading on Infrastructure

- “Americans’ Views of President Trump’s Agenda on Health Care, Immigration, and Infrastructure,” Politico, March 2018.