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Officials press for road funds

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State lawmakers are trying to figure out how to come up with enough money to fix New York's roads and bridges, even as a new study shows the Hudson Valley's infrastructure crumbling more than other downstate areas.

On the web

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<http://www.nyu.edu/wagner/transportation/news>

The state Senate and Assembly have independently endorsed the idea of asking voters to approve a \$2.9 billion bond in November, a step that Gov. George Pataki hasn't decided whether he'll support.

Whether voters will have a chance to decide at the polls about extra money for state transportation projects will likely be resolved as part of the state's budget negotiations, officials said, as early as this week.

"It's important that the bond be approved," said Assemblyman Ryan Karben, D-Monsey. "It's an important piece of our infrastructure strategy. We also need recurring revenue to pay for other parts of the plan."

Pataki has proposed a \$17.4 billion capital budget for the New York State Department of Transportation for the next five years, of which about \$6 billion would be allocated for the downstate area, based on previous budget's allocations between sections of the state.

A study done by New York University, sponsored by the General Contractors Association, was based on state DOT data and concludes that proposed funding to keep state-owned highways and bridges in a state of good repair is insufficient for what is needed.

Among the study's findings about the 14-county downstate region that includes New York City, Rockland, Westchester and Putnam were the following

- Improvements in highway pavement conditions and bridge conditions achieved in the 1990s have slowed, halted or in some cases reversed in the past several years.
- Mobility on these facilities has steadily worsened under a rising tide of traffic congestion.
- The state should spend from \$1.3 billion to \$7.7 billion more than has been proposed during the coming five years to meet the area's needs.

- Without major increases in funding, bridge and highway conditions will likely deteriorate, creating long-term costs for rehabilitation and replacement that will be greater than paying for more work by 2010.
- The proposed budget does not adequately fund such projects as bottleneck elimination, incident management improvement or the creation of high-occupancy vehicle lanes — all of which would help ease congestion.

"The economic development and quality-of-life implications of this need to be considered as the governor and state Legislature finalize funding for the next five-year state transportation plan," said Elliot G. Sander, director of NYU Wagner's Rudin Center for Transportation Policy & Management. "And, if a bond act is part of the solution, voters need to be aware of these facts as well."

State transportation officials dispute the idea that the downstate roads are being neglected, noting that in the Hudson Valley they recently completed a \$180 million renovation of Exit 8 on Interstate 87 just east of the Tappan Zee Bridge tolls.

"The state has made major investments in the Hudson Valley's transportation infrastructure in the last few years," said DOT spokesman Peter Graves.

Pataki said last week he wanted to wait to assess the state's entire borrowing needs before deciding on the transportation bond referendum.

"Any one piece that you isolate might seem OK," Pataki said. "But it is the cumulative impact on the state ... that you have to look at in the context of the whole budget."
