



LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR
DARYL G. PURPERA, CPA, CFE

April 7, 2014

BRIDGE INSPECTION PROGRAM

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The state Department of Transportation and Development needs to do a more timely job of inspecting the 12,905 bridges in Louisiana and adequately document those inspections, according to an audit released Monday by Legislative Auditor Daryl Purpera.

As of March 2013, the state's 12,905 bridges covered 774 miles and carried an average of about 76 million vehicles daily. The report said the average age of the bridges is 35 years. "Because of the public safety impact, it is important for DOTD to inspect bridges appropriately and ensure safety concerns are addressed," the report said.

The performance audit said that of the 12,905 bridges, 14 percent, or 1,806, were "structurally deficient" in 2013, according to Federal Highway Administration standards. The report said the trade group Transportation for America has ranked the state 13th highest in the nation for the number of structurally deficient bridges. The number of structurally deficient bridges has increased by 94 (5.5%) from 1,712 bridges in 2009 to 1,806 in 2013 according to the report.

The state auditor said that DOTD was compliant with nine of 23 performance measures used by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to monitor the bridge inspection program and "substantially compliant or conditionally compliant" with the other 14.

The report said that based on the FHWA's annual compliance review, "DOTD did not inspect all bridges in accordance with federal requirements during fiscal year 2013." According to the FHWA's annual compliance review, DOTD either "did not inspect or could not provide documentation that it had inspected 1,058 of the 6,731 bridges that required an inspection within the required timeframe" of every two to five years.

DOTD has filed plans with the federal government outlining what steps they are taking to bring the department into full compliance with the other 14 performance measures by 2017, and the Federal Highway Administration has approved them, the report said.

"Classifying a bridge as structurally deficient does not imply the bridge is likely to collapse or is unsafe," the report said. "These are bridges that have at least one component – for example a deck, superstructure or substructure – in need of repair."



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The report said that in 2013, 9.5 percent of the “on-system” bridges (751 of 7,908) that are operated and maintained by the state were structurally deficient, while 21.1 percent of the “off-system” bridges (1,055 of 4,997) were structurally deficient. “Off-system” bridges are maintained, owned, and operated by the cities or parishes in which they are located. However, DOTD is responsible for inspecting all bridges.

As of March 2013, DOTD closed 39 bridges for “public safety reasons.” The parish with the highest percentage of structurally deficient bridges, according to the audit, was East Carroll, where 22 of 68 (32.4 percent) were determined to be structurally deficient. St. James was the lowest with no structurally deficient bridges among its 26.

“DOTD estimates that Louisiana has a backlog of \$2.7 billion in bridge maintenance and construction projects, primarily consisting of structurally deficient bridges,” the report said. “Because of the limited funding available to address all of the bridges in the backlog, DOTD has been unable to significantly reduce the number of structurally deficient bridges from 2009 to 2013.”

The \$2.7 billion in bridge projects make up about 22 percent of the approximately \$12.1 billion overall backlog of highway and bridge needs in the state, auditors said. Approximately \$2.4 billion of the \$2.7 billion would go for repair and replacement of the structurally deficient bridges.

Last fiscal year, the state spent \$184.4 million on bridges, including \$137.9 million in federal funds and \$46.5 million in state money.

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On Twitter: DOTD needs to do a more timely job of inspecting the state’s bridges.