The state is removing and replacing the Koran Doyline Road Bridge over Clarke Bayou, near Koran in Bossier Parish. The bridge was closed in February for at least 11 months.

State has $12 billion backlog of road, bridge maintenance

By Alexandria Burris
Gannett Louisiana

Louisiana is one of only 10 states with more structurally deficient bridges in 2014 than the prior year, according to John Olivieri of the United States Public Interest Research Group.

The US PIRG is a federation of consumer advocacy groups. It investigated 2014 Federal Highway Administration data on bridges. It found 187 new bridges have since 2011 been downgraded to structurally deficient, a technical rating used to determine bridges’ needs.

The report comes at time when the state is grappling with how to shrink a $12 billion backlog in deferred road and bridge maintenance. And state and

BRIDGES BY THE NUMBERS

» Over 61,000: Structurally deficient bridges in the United States
» 1,837: Structurally deficient bridges in the Louisiana
» 11: Structurally deficient bridges in Louisiana owned by the Federal government
» 14th: Louisiana’s ranking for number of structurally deficient bridges
» 9th: Louisiana’s ranking for percentage of structurally deficient bridges
Bridges
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federal gas taxes; which provides money for transportation infrastructure, are flat and failing to keep up with inflation.
Eric Kalivoda, Department of Transportation and Development deputy secretary, told the state's House appropriations committee March 24 the department forecasts Louisiana will have serious problems with the condition of its bridges in 10 years.
Kalivoda said the vast majority of the bridges were built in late 50s through the early 1970s. The bridges are reaching their design life and deficiencies will grow substantially.
"We are going to do something about it or we're going to be closing a lot of bridges," he said.

Priorities
Olivieri, the US PIRG's national campaign director for 21st Century Transportation, said hard FHA data highlights the state's spending priorities.
"It's not just the numbers are increasing. It's just that there's such a staggering amount in the first place," he said.
Structurally deficient doesn't mean a bridge is unsafe. It simply means one or more components of a bridge are in need of repairs or replacement.
The Federal Highway Administration will not designate a bridge built or rehabilitated in the last 10 years structurally deficient. The bridge's deck, substructures, superstructures, culverts, and retaining walls are inspected. A bad enough flaw in one or more of those pieces can earn it the structurally deficient designation.
Louisiana has nearly 13,000 bridges and 1,837 are structurally deficient bridges. States and parishes own 92 percent of those deficient bridges and the rest belong to cities, parks and railroad companies.
A separate study by the American Road and Transportation Builders Association found the number of structurally deficient bridges nation wide decreased by 2,000 last year to more than 61,000.
The ARTBA ranked Louisiana 14th in the number of structurally deficient bridges and 9th by percentage.
The two groups say the state's bridge infrastructure will become worse without additional investment at the state and federal level.
DOTD Spokeswoman Lauren Lee said the state invested $1.8 billion into bridge repair since January 2008. Similarly, the state spent approximately $7 billion in roadway improvements since the same time.
"The state appears to favor building new and wider highways at the expense of repair and maintenance," Olivieri said in a statement.

Finding the funding
State Sen. Robert Adley (R-Bossier) said Louisiana has a history of spending money on interstate instead of paying to maintain existing roadways and bridges.
He and other legislators are trying to figure out how to get dollars - diverted to other areas such as the state police - back for bridges and roads.
Adley says a portion of the state's Transportation Trust Fund ends up in the state police budget. The state has diverted $418 million in transportation dollars to state police since 2005, according to a House budget analyst.
Olivieri said Louisiana should focus on fixing broken bridge infrastructure to ensure they are safe and to prevent repair costs from ballooning in the future.
Structurally deficient bridges "are also more prone to safety issues in the future," he said. "They become more expensive to fix in the future. We would never suggest that it's unsafe."
Kalivoda told the House appropriations committee DOTD would use motor vehicle sales tax revenues and any additional federal transportation dollars, if the state can get it, on the state's bridge program, which is at approximately $100 million per year.
But the program is projected to grow to $500 million a year in coming years, he said.
"We've got a window right now for us to plan," he said to the committee.
Every day, cars, buses and trucks travel across Louisiana's structurally deficient bridges 4.8 million times a day, according to the ARTBA.
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Parish, according to the DOTD. In Caddo, there are 57.
The state is responsible for 33 and 45 structurally deficient bridges in Bossier and Caddo Parish respectively. Regardless of the ownership, the state is responsible to perform inspections on all bridges.
The Jimmie Davis Bridge already is undergoing a $23 million rehabilitation project that includes replacing the bridge's deck. In southeast Bossier Parish, the Koran-Doyline Road Bridge, a timber bridge, is being replaced.
Bossier Parish engineer Butch Ford said the parish is responsible for approximately 116 bridges, of which approximately 88 are included in the federal off-system bridge program which offers dollars for transportation infrastructure maintenance. The state provides a match.

Lack of funding
The Bossier Parish Police Jury budgeted $250,000 for bridge maintenance in the fall, but the parish already has exceeded that total due to the repair of eight bridges shut down for emergency repairs.
Closures were the result of inspections by the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, according to notices of the bridge closures. Four of those bridges have since reopened.
Ford said he's asked the police jury to allocate $1 million per year for the next 10 years starting in 2017 to replace 12 bridges.
He isn't convinced the federal funding will ever be there to replace the bridges once they've reached the end of their lifetime.
And he said it's better to ask the police jury instead of waiting for federal and state funding to come.