

## Report: Valley roads get mixed grades

By Tim Sheehan

- Pavement needs in the Valley

**A report released Tuesday by the California State Association of Counties and the League of California Cities estimates how much money is needed over the next 10 years to restore city and county roads to good condition.**

County	Lane miles of pavement	2014 Pavement Condition Index score(on 0-100 scale)	10-year funding needs
Fresno	12,680 miles	69 (fair)	\$2.6 billion
Kings	2,796	62 (fair)	\$598 million
Madera	3,680	47 (poor)	\$1.0 billion
Tulare	8,132	68 (fair)	\$1.5 billion
Statewide	320,466	66 (fair)	\$72.7 billion

Source: NCE, ASTM International

A growing number of city streets and county roads across California are deteriorating faster than local government budgets can maintain them, and roads in the central San Joaquin Valley tend to be in only fair to poor shape, according to a report released Tuesday by the League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties.

For their [fourth biennial "Save California Streets"](#) report, the two lobbying groups and other regional transportation organizations hired Reno-based engineering/consulting firm NCE to analyze pavement-condition information from California's 58 counties and 482 cities. The analysis determined that all but four counties have average road conditions considered "at risk" or poor for motorists to drive on. Using a 100-point scale, in which 100 represents excellent roadway conditions and zero is a failed road, the statewide average condition was rated at 66 — a level considered only fair.

"The conditions of California's local streets and roads are rolling toward a cliff's edge," the report declares.

For cities and counties in the central San Joaquin Valley, the assessments are mixed:

- In unincorporated Tulare County, for example, the average road conditions were reported as "good" in the NCE report. After conditions of streets in cities including Visalia, Tulare, Porterville and other communities were factored in, however, the overall county average was reduced to 68 on the 100-point scale. That is considered to be "at lower risk" by the report's authors, or fair condition according to benchmarks established by nonprofit ASTM International, one of the leading organizations for developing global standards for a wide range of industries.
- Fresno County's overall average roadway condition was reported at 69, also in the "lower risk" or fair range. Cities including Coalinga, Clovis and Sanger reported that their streets were in generally good condition, but the cities of Selma and Reedley both were rated in poor condition.

- Kings County’s overall road conditions were rated at 62, or at lower risk or fair. While streets in the cities of Hanford and Lemoore both were rated as “good,” much of the unincorporated county’s roadways were considered to be in worse shape and rated “at higher risk” according to the report.
- Madera County had the lowest overall roadway rating among the Valley counties, with a “poor” rating of 47 on the 100-point scale. Streets in the city of Madera had a poor rating, while in Chowchilla, the street rating was estimated to be at higher risk.

In a statement accompanying the NCE report, California State Association of Counties executive director Matt Cate blamed a reduction in funding for creating a backlog of maintenance that’s been pushed back and an overall deterioration in California’s local streets and roads — from a road rating of 68 in the first such report in 2008 to 66 this year.

“The state gas tax is only worth half of its value compared to when it was last increased in 1994,” Cate said. “While revenues are decreasing, cities and counties are doing more with less. ... It’s time to get serious about a more stable funding source for local streets, roads and bridges so we can begin to catch up on a backlog of work that should have been completed long ago.”

Fresno, Tulare and Madera counties are among 19 California counties where voters have approved extra sales taxes to provide money specifically for transportation needs. Fresno County’s Measure C, a half-cent tax, was first approved by voters in 1986 won a 20-year extension in 2006. The Measure C extension is expected to generate about \$1.7 billion for transportation projects in Fresno County and its cities by the time it expires in 2027.

Rose Willems, an advocate with the Fresno County Transportation Authority — the agency that administers Measure C — said that while the county’s local roads are considered at-risk in the NCE report and just under “satisfactory” under industry standards, things would be far worse without the sales tax.

“The original measure that started in 1987 generated over \$1 billion for local infrastructure and road improvements, and over the next 20 years, we’re looking at about \$1 billion more,” Willems said. “I don’t believe our local roadway system would be satisfactory without Measure C. ... We wouldn’t be able to keep up with growth or even the day-to-day maintenance.”

Even with extra money from Measure C, however, Fresno County and its cities face a significant shortfall to keep up with maintaining more than 12,600 lane-miles of pavement to what NCE calls “best maintenance practices,” a level that brings 100% of roadways back up to excellent condition — with pavement condition index scores in the mid-80s — and at which roads can be maintained with only occasional overlays and seals without major reconsideration. The report estimates that Fresno County will need almost \$2.6 billion over the next 10 years to achieve that consistent level of road condition.

The 10-year funding levels needed to achieve best maintenance practices in neighboring Valley counties and their cities were about \$600 million in Kings County, just over \$1 billion in Madera County, and nearly \$1.5 billion in Tulare County, the report said.

Statewide, the funding gap between current levels and what is needed to achieve best maintenance practices is estimated at more than \$5.6 billion a year. “Just to maintain the existing pavement condition at 66 will require \$3.328 billion per year, approximately double the existing funding level,” according to the NCE report. The report suggests several possible solutions to filling that gap. They include new paving technologies, including the use of recycled paving materials for lower-cost street maintenance; raising the state’s 18-cent-per-gallon gasoline tax; reinstating vehicle weight fees; increasing the state’s vehicle license fees; and adopting a per-mile fee for motorists as a potential replacement for gasoline taxes.

The report notes that 17 counties in California have either tried and failed to pass sales-tax measures similar to Fresno County’s Measure C, or are considering putting such measures on the ballot.

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