

Dangerous Morris County bridge closes and more could follow as state runs out of money to fix them

Correction: Based on information from Transportation Commissioner Jamie Fox, an earlier version of this story said two bridges had been closed in New Jersey. Only a bridge in Dover has been closed, a state DOT spokesman clarified this afternoon. He said the other bridge, on Morris Avenue in Summit, is in "really terrible" condition, but has not been closed to traffic.

A Morris County bridge has been shut down because engineers deemed it too feeble to carry the weight of traffic, and Transportation Commissioner Jamie Fox warned other spans could follow if new revenues aren't found to prop up the state Transportation Trust Fund.

"We have [one] bridge in the last three weeks that [was] closed down ... because we couldn't safely move a car or truck across [it]," Fox said. "The Prospect Street bridge in Dover. ... And [there are 500 \(bridges\) behind them](#), waiting to be fixed."

He warned the audience of transportation officials and professionals at Monday's meeting of [North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority](#), which represents 13 northern New Jersey counties, that more bridges could be closed.

"We determined that a fire truck crossing (the Prospect Street bridge) has the potential for collapse," Fox said after he addressed the NJTPA. "At any moment my staff could say to me, we need to shut another one down."

The NJTPA voted to add \$4.8 million replacement of the Prospect Street bridge to the state transportation improvement plan. Typically, engineers reduce the weight limit a bridge is allowed to carry based on inspections and the age of the span.

The trust fund, which finances large road, bridge and transit projects, [runs out of money in June](#) to do anything except pay off past debt. Unlike past years, when the state borrowed money to make up for the lack of revenue to do new work, the trust fund has reached its credit limit, Fox said.

Fox, who also held the commissioner job during the McGreevey administration, took some of the blame for "kicking the can down the road" on transportation funding and increasing borrowing instead of finding new revenues.

While he didn't specifically mention [increasing the state gas tax](#) as a likely revenue source, Fox alluded to it by commenting about [the lowest gas prices seen in six years](#).

"Are we waiting for a crisis? We are in crisis. Now is the time, when gas prices are low," he said. "The money has run out and the projects are accumulating."

[An interactive guide to how the gas tax works](#)

Fox maintained that "everything" is on the table, after Hudson County executive Thomas DeGise, who also chairs the NJTPA, asked about charging tolls on "free" interstate highways.

There is public resistance to increasing the gas tax, which people see as a last refuge for taxpayers balancing their family budgets. Polls conducted by Rutgers' Eagleton Institute of Politics have shown [a majority of those surveyed oppose raising the state gas tax](#), though opposition has softened since this past spring.

Fox said bad roads cost the average driver \$600 in automotive repairs a year. Government also has to prove to citizens that it is wisely using the money, he said

"People pay a lot of tolls and taxes. We must come up with cost saving ideas. We must tell [the public] what we'll spend the money on and how we'll reform things, whether it's using design-build or public-private partnerships."

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