

Report: County roads need work

Written by [Chris Caskey, The Union Democrat](#) May 30, 2013 12:30 pm

Tuolumne County would need to spend about \$10 million a year to improve a road system that an independent consultant deemed as generally poor.

Nichols Consulting Engineers submitted a report last week documenting the condition of the county's more-than 600 miles of locally maintained roads. The report shows that the county's road system, while about average when compared to nearby counties, still needs improvements that the county will be unlikely to afford in the coming years.

The report ranks road conditions on a 100-point scale, with 50 set as the dividing line between fair and poor, good to excellent set at 70 and above, and very poor below 25. The county's overall road system averaged a 46, which sets it below Calaveras (53) and Inyo (57) counties but higher than Amador (34) and Mariposa (44).

"We're kind of in the middle of the stack," said Margot Yapp, an engineer with Nichols Consulting. And the number doesn't mean all of the county's roads are below average. In fact, the county's main roads known as arterials average an 84, the second tier roads known as major collectors averaged 66, which is still well above fair.

The local and residential roads, which represent about 57 percent of the county-maintained road network, rate a 36. Almost two-thirds of the county roads, according to the report, rate "poor" to "very poor."

"The overall impression is you've got a lot of (poor) or (very poor) roads. Unfortunately that is the truth," Yapp said last week.

"It costs money to maintain roads," she said. "It costs a lot more to maintain roads when they're in failed conditions."

According to the report, the county last year spent about \$1.5 million on pavement maintenance. To bring the current road system completely up to good repair, according to the report, it would cost more than \$200 million over 20 years. Keeping funding at the current rate, Yapp said, would cause the same road system to drop from 46 to 20, which is very poor.

"It's a big problem to think about," she said.

The county Board of Supervisors has listed roads high on its priorities list in recent years, and just last week the board committed almost \$900,000 in available one-time funds from the current budget to road improvement projects.

But according to members of the board, there will still be some hard decisions in the future.

Supervisor Karl Rodefer described it as a "dismal" picture, and suggested the county may have to "walk away from some stuff" when it comes to road maintenance. And board Chairman Randy Hanvelt said forcing them to choose between important road maintenance and other programs like public safety is like "asking me to choose which one of my children I love the best."

Members of the board asked county road officials to look into incentive programs, additional funding and possible partnerships or other options.