Executive Summary

Spending on bridges and roads represents one of Rhode Island's most substantial capital commitments, with over $1 billion expended annually in combined state and federal revenues. Launched in 2016, the RhodeWorks program reduced the number of structurally deficient bridges in the state by nearly half through targeted spending. However, this concentrated focus came with trade-offs: nation-leading debt levels, a chronic backlog in routine road maintenance, and non-interstate arterial routes ranked worst in the country.

Key Findings

- Rhode Island's **capital spending on roads and bridges averaged $461 per capita** between FY 2020 and FY 2024— 15th highest nationally and more than twice the U.S. average. Rhode Island ranked third highest in spending per lane-mile ($162,891).
- Rhode Island directed half of capital outlays to bridges between FY 2020 an FY 2024—ranking first nationally and over seven times the U.S. average (7%). **Roadway spending accounted for just 31% of capital spending**, lower than any other state.
- Rhode Island had the nation's highest capital-to-maintenance imbalance, **spending $8.40 on capital for every $1.00 on routine maintenance**—more than 2.5 times the U.S. average.
- Debt service accounted for 15% of spending between FY 2020 and FY 2024 and ranked first nationally in debt spending per capita. **Debt, administration, and soft costs combined made up 44% of state public surface transportation revenues**.
- **Bridge deck rated in Poor condition fell from 24% to 15% between 2016 and 2024** (49th nationally), while 66% was rated Fair (first) and 19% was rated Good (49th).
- Rhode Island's interstate highway pavement conditions held a middling rank nationally (27th), but **state-maintained non-interstate arterial routes ranked worst in the nation (50th).**
- Rhode Island faces a **$278.9 million projected shortfall in state matching funds** from FY 2027 through FY 2031.
- In its ten-year transportation plan, the state maintains the same investment priorities, projecting a **$7.56-to-$1.00 capital-to-maintenance imbalance** while allocating nearly double the capital funding to bridges as to roadways.

Recommendations

Rebalance capital and maintenance spending

Limit future debt issuance

Prioritize resurfacing on non-interstate state routes

Develop a dedicated state matching mechanism