

Local Bridge Improvement Assistance (Local Bridge Program)

Statute: Local Bridge Program: [§84.18](#) Admin. Rule: [Trans 212](#), [Trans 213](#)

Program definition:

The Local Bridge Improvement Assistance Program helps rehabilitate and replace, on a cost-shared basis, the most seriously deteriorating existing local bridges on Wisconsin's local highway and road systems. Administrative Code Chapter [Trans 213](#) details the method of determining eligibility for funding of local bridges. Local units of government are responsible under Administrative Code Chapter [Trans 212](#) for the maintenance and inspection of local bridges. Please note that certain sections of Chapter 212 and 213 are affected by Emergency Rule [EmR2509](#).

Program eligibility:

Projects must meet federal and state requirements. A project must be located on a locally owned public roadway (not on a connecting highway) and the structure must have an overall structure opening greater than 20 feet in length along the center of the roadway to be eligible for funding. Counties, cities, villages, and towns are eligible for funding through the Local Bridge Program based on identification through the Bridge Project Scope Eligibility List. Each county is responsible to review and prioritize eligible bridge projects within that county. Inclusion in the Bridge Project Scope Eligibility List is determined by noted deficiencies in the most recent inspection (prior to February 17, 2025) along with an extrapolation of those deficiencies into future years.

In emergency situations where the structural integrity of a bridge is compromised, resulting in the closure of a bridge to motor vehicle traffic, the Department may consider accepting an "off-cycle" application to replace the damaged bridge. Local Bridge funds must be available to consider an "off-cycle" request.

To maximize the number of bridges improved through the Local Bridge Program, funding eligibility is limited to the minimum project scope necessary for a safe and effective facility. The starting point for determination of the eligible scope is based on the condition of the existing facility. The scope of the project may increase based on safety, conformance with applicable minimum federal and state engineering standards, projected traffic needs, or other factors as approved by WisDOT.

For all Local Bridge projects, federal or state funds must cover no less than 80 percent of specific individual participating project costs with local funds providing the remaining 20 percent, plus any federal or state non-participating items. Guidelines governing projects awarded to tribal governments may be subject to exceptions regarding funding caps. At the discretion of the department, the federal/state share of project costs can exceed 80 percent if allowable under the provisions of the currently authorized federal service transportation act and based on the availability of state budget authority. This flexibility may be dependent on specific criteria, including but not limited to roadway classification.

Program Cycle Considerations, Application Process:

Each county is responsible to review and prioritize bridge applications within that county, which are subject to meeting eligibility requirements for the program. By definition, a local bridge is considered to be seriously deteriorating if it has observed deficiencies that have been documented in the most recent inspection (Trans. 213.02(8)).

Locals submit bridge inspection information to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) Bureau of Structures. The most recent inspection for each project is then used by the Bureau of Structures to determine the Bridge Project Scope Eligibility List. The decision on whether to apply for local bridge funds is the responsibility of the local unit of government. Both federal and state funds for local bridges are allocated by formula to each county based on its statewide proportional share of bridge rehabilitation and replacement costs. Counties then prioritize the projects that were applied for.

Projects eligible for the Local Bridge program based on their Deck Condition Rating may be submitted for preservation or rehabilitation funding. Projects eligible for the Local Bridge Program based on their Superstructure, Substructure, or Culvert Condition Rating may be submitted for rehabilitation or replacement.

If a local owner wishes to submit a Local Bridge project that is not identified on the Bridge Project Scope Eligibility List or is outside of the determined necessary scope, an application can be submitted with the requested scope along with proper justification. This justification is defined as an engineering study that considers the timing of the proposed project, alternative scopes, safety of the travelling public, structural serviceability, and a cost-benefit analysis of the proposed scope versus other viable options within the local unit of government's purview.

In unforeseen emergency situations, such as those with vehicular or maritime traffic impacts or natural disasters, the Department may consider accepting an "off-cycle" application to replace the damaged bridge. Local Bridge funds must be available to consider any "off-cycle" request. Please note that there is an expectation that applicants will pursue any additionally available disaster and emergency funding sources concurrently with the submission of any "off-cycle" Local Bridge Improvement Assistance Program funding request.

Program history:

A federal program for local bridge replacement was initiated in 1979, which included a requirement that all non-state-maintained bridges be inspected once every two years. WisDOT developed a planning inventory and needs assessment, which resulted in a program to replace or rehabilitate bridges on the local system. State funds for the local bridge entitlement program were first approved in the 1981-83 biennial budget.

Application cycle:

To continue statewide program stability efforts, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) will manage a full five-year (five state fiscal years) program of projects. This provides the department and local sponsors the ability to review and adjust the already scheduled first two state fiscal years of the programs (2027 and 2028) as needed and add another three state fiscal years of approved projects to the schedule (2029, 2030 and 2031).

WisDOT Regional and Statewide contact information can be found on the corresponding [WisDOT web page](#).