The infrastructure in the Twin Ports region merits an overall “C” grade. Our infrastructure is mediocre and requires increased attention. An expert team of over 20 civil engineers and industry professionals from 16 organizations was assembled to evaluate seven infrastructure categories of the Twin Ports area. The results have been reviewed and summarized by ASCE’s team of national experts, the Committee on America’s Infrastructure.

As civil engineers, our job is to plan, design, build and maintain our infrastructure networks. We provide for safe modes of transportation at airports, bridges, ports and roads. We provide the public with safe drinking water and protect the public health by disposing of waste in a responsible manner. Without reliable infrastructure, forward-looking maintenance programs and adequate funding sources from all levels of government, the Twin Ports region will lose its economic competitiveness.

We have recent success stories in the region: new airport terminals and runways, the Highway 53 relocation project in Virginia, the Port of Duluth Intermodal Project, the Greater Minnesota Transportation Sales Tax, and many others. However, if we assume that the job is complete based on these success stories, we will not be in position to meet the many infrastructure challenges that we still face as a region.

ASCE’s Code of Ethics states that “Engineers shall issue public statements only in an objective and truthful manner” and that “Engineers shall hold paramount the safety, health and welfare of the public.” As such, we take the responsibility of our message in this inaugural Twin Ports Infrastructure Report Card seriously. We present this report card as a fulfillment of our public duty and to inform the public and our elected officials on the state of our region’s infrastructure.

The overarching conclusion is that our region’s infrastructure is currently slightly better than the national average, but backsliding will occur in the next 5-10 years if infrastructure funding issues do not continue to be pushed to the forefront.
The 2018 Report Card on the Twin Ports area’s Infrastructure gave the state an overall g.p.a. of C. The Twin Ports area’s civil engineers studied 7 infrastructure categories. Of those 7, two infrastructure categories are in good condition, three categories are in mediocre condition, and two categories are in poor condition.

The good news is there are solutions to all these challenges, and we can raise the Twin Ports area’s infrastructure grades. By learning more today about the conditions of the infrastructure you use every day, you too can help raise the grade.

Recent upgrades to pavement and commercial airport terminal buildings in Brainerd, Duluth International, Falls Regional and Range Regional Airports have resulted in infrastructure that is in new condition with increased capacity. The condition will continue to improve in the next four years as some of the most poorly rated pavements in the region undergo scheduled relief to other municipalities for drinking water improvement programs, but funding falls short of projected need by a wide margin.

Port infrastructure in the Twin Ports region includes commercial, private, and municipal/federal dock structures, facilities, shipping channels and slips in the Duluth-Superior Harbor.

Wastewater infrastructure analyzed in the Duluth region includes nearly 500 miles of underground piping and the largest wastewater treatment plant. While existing capacity is sufficient, the condition of wastewater infrastructure needs improvement, but is not at risk at this time. In the City of Duluth, between 30% and 40% of the 400-mile wastewater piping needs to be replaced as much of the piping is between 60 and 100 years old and has outlived its original design service life. The City of Duluth, Public Works & Utilities department reports that nearly $100 million has been invested in wastewater infrastructure in the City of Duluth in the last 10 years and also reports good condition and stable funding.

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The roads of the Twin Ports region have sufficient capacity and public safety is a high priority. However, condition of roadway pavement, particularly in the City of Duluth, are cause for concern. Recent local funding initiatives authorized through the Greater Minnesota Transportation Sales Tax program, such as the recent Saint Louis County Transportation 0.5% sales tax, are an attempt to close the funding gap and are reasons for optimism. A similar initiative by the City of Duluth would help improve roadway conditions in the largest city in the Twin Ports area. However, available funding continues to be insufficient to comprehensively address the region’s road needs.

The primary solid waste management authorities within the Twin Ports region support an integrated solid waste management strategy. Solid waste abatement programs and solid waste management facilities that support that strategy are adequately funded, in good condition and have capacity for current and projected demand. Even with continued growth of solid waste abatement through education, source reduction, recycling and reuse, landfill capacity will remain a necessary component of solid waste management in the region. Availability of that capacity is a concern beyond 2022.

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