



TIME TO REBUILD AMERICA'S TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Americans depend on a modern and safe transportation system and infrastructure to transport goods and people and to keep the economy strong. Recent catastrophic failures show how tenuously the national system functions when under-funded and neglected by the federal government. In 2005, Americans recoiled in horror as Louisiana levy failures inundated New Orleans with floodwaters and ruined that historic city. This August, we again witnessed the tragic consequences of our failing infrastructure when the I-35W Bridge collapsed in Minneapolis, Minnesota killing 13 and shutting down commerce.

State and federal officials had recognized the need for maintenance and repair on the I-35W Bridge for years before the collapse. Problems with the bridge, constructed in 1967, had been detected as early as 2001, when a survey by state transportation officials discovered stresses in the bridge's steel. In 2005, the steel superstructure was given a "poor" rating, which placed it in the bottom six percent of all publicly owned highway bridges. The I-35W bridge was not an isolated example of a structure in disrepair – it is a symbol of America's failing infrastructure and the lack of political will among our elected leaders to do something about it. Additionally, critical bridge inspections should be performed by qualified employees who are properly trained and given the resources they need to protect the public interest.

There are 6,175 bridges in the National Highway System in need of restoration or replacement. Even more do not meet the current standards for new bridge construction. All told, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation, more than one quarter of the nation's bridges is structurally deficient or functionally obsolete. Transportation labor calls on our elected officials to do whatever is necessary to head off more disasters.

House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman James Oberstar (D-MN) has offered a common-sense proposal, the National Highway System Bridge Reconstruction Initiative, which would create a dedicated trust fund to pay for immediate bridge improvements. Chairman Oberstar's plan calls for a five cent gas tax, which would sunset in three years, and generate approximately \$25 billion. The fund revenues would be distributed based on independent evaluations of safety and need.

In the Senate, Patty Murray, Chair of the Transportation-HUD Appropriations Subcommittee offered an amendment last week to the Subcommittee's spending bill to provide states with an additional \$1 billion for bridge repair. The proposal was adopted by a 66 to 33 vote and remained in the final legislation passed on the Senate floor last week. We were also pleased that efforts to water down this proposal were rejected as was a mean-spirited and ill advised proposal to waive Davis-Bacon prevailing wage requirements. Unfortunately, the Senate bill did not include full funding for public transportation at the levels authorized by SAFETEA-LU. Appropriations for the New Starts and Small Starts programs were frozen at the fiscal year 2007 level, which is \$134 million short of the House bill. We urge members of Congress to fully fund transit.

The Oberstar and Murray proposals are important to meeting America's immediate needs and we support their enactment. But these bridge initiatives are only down payments on what the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) says is a \$180 billion price tag over 20 years. The same can be said for all other sectors of our transportation system and infrastructure – roads, mass transit, airports and air traffic control, Amtrak, freight rail and ports – which need tens of billions in new investment.

It is therefore disappointing that the Bush Administration has voiced its opposition to the Oberstar and Murray proposals while failing to provide a credible alternative to rebuild and maintain our aging transportation infrastructure. In fact, the Administration is missing in action on this critically important debate. Instead, it has offered more of the same: tired old rhetoric that infrastructure needs can be addressed if only we would turn over public transportation assets to the private sector. Members of this Administration's own party have questioned the wisdom of these public-private initiatives. TTD has long recognized that private investment, properly managed and in compliance with strong labor protections, does have a role to play in meeting our transportation needs, but it can never be a substitute for robust federal investment. Unfortunately, this White House has never really understood this most basic fact. Indeed, it was the Bush Administration that opposed and threatened vetoes of bipartisan Congressional efforts to increase funding for transit systems, roads and bridges in the last surface transportation reauthorization bill, or SAFETEA-LU. It is also this Administration that has failed as the chief steward of our badly congested air transport system and has tried to bankrupt Amtrak and leave our passenger rail system in ruins.

Three decades ago America's transportation infrastructure was in a growing state of disrepair. Today this problem has grown into a crisis. The lack of investment has pushed the transportation system to the brink of collapse that, as we witnessed in Minneapolis, is threatening the economy, the safety of Americans and our way of life. More band-aids and half-measures will not get the job done. Transportation labor is pleased to see lawmakers raising their voices and calling for action. But it is now time for our elected leaders to go beyond the rhetoric and find the political will to make this the generation that rebuilt our aging transportation infrastructure.

Policy Statement No. F07-01

Adopted September 20, 2007