

*Before the*

**COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

*Statement of*

**THE AMERICAN TRUCKING ASSOCIATIONS, INC.**

*On*

**Structurally Deficient Bridges in the United States**

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***Driving Trucking's Success***

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Oberstar, Congressman Mica, members of the Committee, thank you very much for inviting the American Trucking Associations<sup>1</sup> to testify on the condition of the Nation's infrastructure and bridges. Members of this committee well understand the importance of the nation's infrastructure. It is unfortunate that it took the tragic collapse of the Interstate 35W bridge to focus the public's and media's attention on the vulnerabilities of the highway system. However, we must not lose this opportunity to educate the American people about the very real safety and economic consequences of failing to adequately maintain and improve the system. We thank you for providing a forum that will help to inform the debate and, hopefully, move us toward agreement on solutions to the challenges we face.

The trucking industry and the highway system that supports it are the linchpins in the nation's freight transportation system. The industry hauls 69 percent of the freight by volume and 84 percent by revenue. In addition, the trucking industry plays an important role in the movement of intermodal rail, air and water freight. Truck tonnage is projected to increase, reaching toward the 14 billion ton mark by 2017. Trucking revenue accounts for \$623 billion of our nation's economy. The rest of the transportation modes combined account for \$116 billion. By 2017, trucking revenue will exceed \$1.1 trillion, and the trucking industry will represent 85.1% of the market. This growth, of course, means that a lot more trucks will be on the road. We estimate another 2.7 million more trucks will be needed to serve the nation's economy, a 40 percent increase.<sup>2</sup>

A reliable network of highways is crucial to our industry's ability to deliver goods safely, efficiently and on schedule. Since deregulation and completion of the Interstate Highway System over the previous quarter century, the trucking industry has made continuous improvements that have allowed its customers to significantly reduce inventories and create manufacturing and supply chain efficiencies that have saved the U.S. economy billions of dollars, increased salaries, slowed consumer price increases and created innumerable jobs. Any disruption to the movement of freight on our nation's highway system will jeopardize these gains.

## **THE NATIONAL HIGHWAY SYSTEM: AMERICA'S CONVEYOR BELT**

Mr. Chairman, our highway infrastructure is a network of roads, bridges, and tunnels that link our Nation together. That network includes super-structures like the Chesapeake Bay Bridge or the Woodrow Wilson Bridge that are vital links in moving people and goods. However, that system also includes bridges over creeks and streams that may only carry a few cars and trucks on any given day. Both are important and both need to be maintained. But tragedies like the I-35 bridge collapse highlight how vulnerable our system is when a structure on a major highway is damaged, closed or load-posted. The resulting traffic disruptions distress local and regional economies due to higher freight rates and lost business opportunities. Significant costs are also

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<sup>1</sup> The American Trucking Associations is the largest national trade association for the trucking industry. Through a federation of other trucking groups, the industry-related conferences and its 50 affiliated state trucking associations, ATA represents more than 37,000 members covering every type of motor carrier in the United States.

<sup>2</sup> Global Insight, *U.S. Freight Transportation Forecast to...2017*, 2006.

incurred due to lost time and wasted fuel sitting in congestion and having to divert to alternative routes. Burning additional fuel produces greater emissions, affecting people's health and potentially contributing to climate change.

Mr. Chairman, as was pointed out above, the trucking industry moves the vast majority of the Nation's freight. Much of this freight moves on the National Highway System. This 162,158-mile network comprises just 4.1% of total highway miles, yet it carries nearly 45% of total vehicle miles.<sup>3</sup> The Interstate Highway System, which is a subset of the NHS, carries 41% of truck traffic, even though it has just one percent of total highway miles. Furthermore, the NHS provides critical links to more than 200 important military installations and ports.<sup>4</sup> The NHS can be described as the country's conveyor belt. In fact, many businesses that have dramatically reduced their inventories rely on trucks as an integral part of their assembly lines. Trucks traveling on the NHS deliver goods to manufacturing facilities, stores, homes and intermodal facilities. However, when this network experiences inefficiencies, whether due to posted bridges or daily congestion, the economic impacts ripple throughout the supply chain and can greatly impact the health of regional economies.

Despite its obvious importance to the Nation, significant portions of the NHS are in poor condition, are routinely congested, and have been starved by insufficient investment. Of the more than 116,000 NHS bridges, over 6,000 are structurally deficient and more than 17,000 are functionally obsolete.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, 760 NHS bridges are load-posted.<sup>6</sup> Posting of bridges forces trucks to use alternative routes, increasing freight transportation costs and requiring greater fuel use, which produces more emissions. NHS bridges carry nearly two-thirds of the travel on structurally deficient or functionally obsolete bridges.<sup>7</sup> The current NHS bridge investment backlog is estimated to be \$32.1 billion.<sup>8</sup> Mr. Chairman, it is clear that due to the NHS' critical role in meeting transportation needs, and because of the NHS' significant spending requirements, future bridge investments must be concentrated on this highway network.

## **MEETING HIGHWAY INVESTMENT NEEDS**

While this hearing and the public's attention are, understandably, focused on bridges, we must not forget that bridges are simply individual components of the highway network. Mr. Chairman, the National Highway System Bridge Reconstruction Initiative (NHS BRI) can be a good model for future highway investment decisions. The emphasis on prioritizing investment based on greatest need and the stipulations against earmarking are principals that can and should be applied to the entire federal highway program.

According to the Federal Highway Administration, today's \$70 billion investment in highways and bridges would have to nearly double – to \$132 billion – in order to significantly improve

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<sup>3</sup> *Highway Performance Monitoring System*, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> FHWA 2006 *Status of the Nation's Highways, Bridges, and Transit: Conditions and Performance*, Chapter 12.

<sup>5</sup> FHWA National Bridge Inventory, Aug. 2, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, Dec. 31, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 2004

<sup>8</sup> FHWA 2006 *Status of the Nation's Highways, Bridges, and Transit: Conditions and Performance*.

highway conditions and reduce congestion.<sup>9</sup> Bridge rehabilitation costs alone are \$2 billion short of what is needed annually. Federal investment in highways must rise by 50% above forecasted levels by 2015 just to maintain current levels of highway condition and performance.<sup>10</sup>

Given the reluctance to raise necessary revenues for surface transportation, this level of investment is unlikely. Therefore, a new highway investment strategy, modeled on the NHS BRI, is needed to ensure that the most critical projects receive sufficient funding. ATA recommends that the Committee focus first on critically deficient bridges and congestion-inducing bottlenecks that plague Interstate Highway System segments with significant freight flows. For example, a preliminary study for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)<sup>11</sup> identified the highway bottlenecks that caused the greatest amount of delay for trucks. The study estimated that the more than 200 identified bottlenecks cost the trucking industry more than 243 million hours annually, with a direct financial cost of approximately \$7.8 billion. The study estimates that highway bottlenecks account for 40 percent of congestion, with the remainder caused by accidents, bad weather, construction, special events and poor signal timing.

Over the past 20 years the Highway Bridge Program (HBP) and its predecessor, the Highway Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation program (HBRR), has been funded at a level equivalent to roughly 11% to 14% of total annual transportation program apportionments.<sup>12</sup> Under SAFETEA-LU the program provides an average \$4.1 billion annually for HBP. However, beginning with ISTEA, up to 40% of HBP state apportionments can be "flexed" to non-bridge related projects. Mr. Chairman, we encourage the Committee to reconsider this provision during SAFETEA-LU reauthorization in order to ensure that all HBP resources are dedicated to bridges. Furthermore, any bridge on a public road is eligible under this program. ATA recommends that eligibility be narrowed to allow spending only on NHS bridges in order to focus limited resources on the most critical highways.

## **HIGHWAY AND BRIDGE DETERIORATION**

Mr. Chairman, even the most well designed and best maintained bridge will deteriorate over time for a variety of reasons. All vehicles, including trucks, play a role in this process. It is important to understand, however, that bridge collapses are generally the result of singular events, and are not usually caused by the slow progression of deterioration. In fact, of the dozen investigations conducted by the National Transportation Safety Board into bridge collapses over the last thirty years, NTSB found that none were due to deterioration. The events were the result of the bridge being struck by a barge or vehicle, an earthquake, flood or other unanticipated occurrence.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> American Road and Transportation Builders Assn., *The Nation's Highway and Transit Investment Needs through 2015: An Analysis of the U.S. DOT 2006 Report on Conditions and Performance of the Nation's Highways, Bridges and Mass Transit Systems*. April 2, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Cambridge Systematics and Battelle Memorial Institute for the Federal Highway Administration, "An Initial Assessment of Freight Bottlenecks on Highways," Oct. 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Congressional Budget Office, *Highway Bridges: Conditions and the Federal/State Role*. Aug. 10, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> NTSB website, Aug. 23, 2007: [http://www.nts.gov/Publictn/H\\_Acc.htm](http://www.nts.gov/Publictn/H_Acc.htm)

If a bridge does collapse due to fatigue or other structural issues, it is likely that this could have been prevented by better inspection, maintenance and management practices. Therefore, Mr. Chairman, we support your efforts to enhance inspection procedures and techniques, and to improve bridge management.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

ATA looks forward to working with the Committee to address the Nation's bridge and other highway infrastructure needs. We recognize our responsibility to help finance these needs. However, Mr. Chairman, our members - and we believe the public at large - view highway user charges as an investment in mobility and safety. We look to Congress, the Administration, and the states to allocate that investment in a rational manner. In short, a good return on their investment. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to testify and I will be pleased to respond to any questions.