

**STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE JAMES L. OBERSTAR
HEARING ON MAINTAINING OUR NATION'S HIGHWAY AND TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT
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I want to welcome the witnesses and thank you all for being here today. We look forward to hearing from the various state departments of transportation, transit agencies and regional authorities that will testify before us.

Transportation infrastructure provides the backbone of our economy by moving people and goods. Maintaining our nation's highway and transit systems is critical to ensuring that these assets remain safe and reliable in the future.

The collapse of the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis on August 1st served as a reminder of the critical importance of our infrastructure. Though this tragedy directly impacted the residents of my home state of Minnesota, aging infrastructure is a problem not confined to one state.

This collapse demonstrates the need to make a commitment to invest in the maintenance and major reconstruction our nation's infrastructure. Many of the nation's surface transportation facilities are being stretched to the limit of their design life and beyond.

Many aspects of the nation's highway infrastructure were constructed in the 1960's and 1970's, and are reaching the end of their useful design life and will require significant rehabilitation and reconstruction.

As pavement structures reach 40 to 50 years of life, rehabilitation and resurfacing will no longer be sufficient and major portions of the nation's roadway network will require complete pavement and foundation reconstruction.

In addition to their age, many segments of the roadway network handle much greater volume of traffic than originally projected—including a 52.4 percent increase in freight ton-miles by truck between 1990 and 2005.

Of the 594,101 bridges in the National Bridge Inventory, 26.2 percent of America's bridges—more than one in four—are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete.

Our extensive transit network also requires significant maintenance and repair, particularly if transit is to remain a viable and an attractive transportation option.

Transit systems around the U.S. provided 10.3 billion trips in 2007, handling the highest ridership level in 50 years. In just the first three months of 2008, Americans took 2.6 billion trips on public transportation. This is almost 85 million more trips than in the same time period last year.

Maintaining our transit assets in light of the growing number of riders is no small task for our transit agencies.

There are over 11,000 miles of transit system fixed guideway track, 3,000 transit rail stations, and more than 171,000 transit vehicles in service today.

Unfortunately, nearly one-third of urban bus maintenance facilities are in an unacceptable condition, while over fifty percent of urban rail passenger stations are rated as substandard by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

We must ensure that our older rail and bus systems, as well as our newer systems, are being maintained and upgraded on a regular basis.

As we consider the infrastructure needs of our country in preparation for the next surface transportation authorization, we must provide the resources and support to ensure that our highway, bridge and public transit systems are brought to, and kept in, a state-of-good repair.