

# National Association of County Engineers

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## **NACE UPDATE**

The almost bi-weekly newsletter for Board members & Committee Chairs

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(Note: Sources of information include the AASHTO Journal, NACo staff, Senate and House publications, the Federal Highway Administration, and other association news journals)

### **A Message from NACE President George T. Webb**

On behalf of our 1900 plus members, NACE extends its deepest condolences to the victims, the injured, their families and all others affected by the catastrophic bridge collapse in Minneapolis on August 1st. This collapse, along with the recent rupture of an 83 year old steam pipe in New York City and the fatality associated with it, has brought the condition of the nation's infrastructure to the attention of national and local media and politicians. NACE and its members will continue to work closely with the media and elected leaders in our communities to provide authoritative information and technical expertise on the condition of our own assets. Together, we need to advocate for action to make our country's infrastructure safer and sustainable for future generations. Funds must be invested and significant steps must be made on the national level, as well as in state legislatures and local communities, to improve our nation's failing infrastructure. We should remember that it is our on-going duty to communicate these needs to our elected officials.

The public trust and confidence needs to be restored not by a university professor, a governor, or a state DOT engineer, but by you, the local official that they know and see in their community. Use this as an opportunity to educate first and foremost your County Boards and Commissions. Let them know of the many hours spent training our certified, professional bridge inspectors. Share with them the efforts of your bridge inspectors in documenting every crack and monitoring changes year after year. This is an opportunity to give them the bridge rating list and explain the key points. We need to communicate that structurally deficient does not mean eminent danger. Highlight proactive, local investments of the past, and encourage the political will for the future. A key component of our job is supporting our elected officials with the tools they need to intelligently address the problem, both in the Board Room and on Main Street.

We see on our own systems the effect of deterioration, use beyond design and the challenge of prioritizing our infrastructure. Our role is to learn from the cause of these tragedies, not help point fingers or assess blame and develop systems and processes that will minimize such infrastructure failures in the future. We use our engineering training to manage our roads and bridges, striving to be cost effective in how we carry out this management responsibility. We constantly compete with other public needs in determining the amount of funding made available to maintain, and in some cases, upgrade our infrastructure. If our policy makers determine that infrastructure funding

should be granted a new, higher priority, we need to be ready to show the elected officials and public what they will receive for such additional investment.

The sadness of such a tragic loss of life should not be overshadowed by a lack of action. NACE members have a historic opportunity to impact generations to come by focusing our efforts in this critical area. We watched as the first responders to the Minnesota tragedy pulled together to minimize the potential additional loss of life. We also need to pull together to get the message out and encourage and energize the political will to address this issue.

### **Swift Reaction to Minneapolis Bridge Collapse**

Federal officials have pledged both money and assistance to quickly restore the Interstate bridge that collapsed Wednesday in Minneapolis, resulting in at least five fatalities and scores of injuries. The eight-lane, steel-girder bridge carrying Interstate 35W was the most heavily traveled in the state, with an average traffic of 140,000 vehicles daily. Constructed in 1967, the bridge had been inspected in June, according to state officials, and rated as structurally deficient but adequate for travel. While the death toll following the collapse stood at five, eight people are still reported missing and are thought to be trapped in the cars pinned under the wreckage of the bridge. U.S. Secretary of Transportation Mary Peters appeared at a press conference in Minneapolis with Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty, Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak and other officials. She pledged \$5 million in emergency aid to help restore the Interstate 35W steel-girder bridge. “We are going to make sure that last night’s damage and debris soon become a thing of the past. We will rebuild this bridge and repair this horrible hole in the heart of this community,” Secretary Peters said. The secretary said the \$5 million “will give crews the support they need to begin restoring traffic flow, clearing debris, setting up detours, and making repairs.” She pledged that the federal government will continue to be a close partner with the state to do everything possible to get the bridge up and running as soon as possible, and that any future requests for additional funds will be quickly evaluated and processed. The Federal Highway Administration called upon the states to reinspect the 746 steel deck truss bridges existing across the country of a similar design, in the wake of the tragedy. State transportation department leaders held press briefings across the country to reassure the public of the condition and safety of bridges in their jurisdictions. Peters stated that she has asked the U.S. DOT Inspector General to review the National Bridge Inspection Program and make recommendations for future changes, if needed, to ensure the safety of the nation’s bridges.

### **Oberstar Introduces Bridge Reconstruction Legislation**

Meanwhile, Rep. James Oberstar (D-MN), Chairman of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, held a press conference to discuss emergency legislation he was introducing to address the bridge collapse. The legislation, co-sponsored by members of the Minnesota delegation, would provide \$250 million in emergency spending for relief, recovery and reconstruction of the 40-year old span. Oberstar said, “We have a national bridge problem” and that state departments of transportation need the financial resources to “take action.” Oberstar likened the emergency relief, H.R. 3311, to the spending package congress put together to assist California in reopening of the MacArthur Maze in the San Francisco Bay area when a tanker ran into a piling, exploding and destroying a section of highway. Part of the \$250 million will go to immediate congestion relief that Minneapolis and St. Paul will face with the collapse of the I-35W bridge. The rest will be to reconstruct the span. The bill

would also lift the current \$100 million cap on the amount of emergency relief funds a state may receive for a disaster. Citing 2005 Bureau of Transportation Statistics figures, Oberstar said there are 592,473 bridges in the U.S., of which 75,621 are structurally deficient. An even greater number—79,523—are rated functionally obsolete. Even though federal funding in the bridge program has increased annually, the rising costs of building materials has eroded those investments. Oberstar and T&I Highways and Transit Subcommittee Chairman Rep. Peter DeFazio said there has been chronic underinvestment in transportation infrastructure over the years. The most recent highway and transit authorization was 2005's Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users, which provided \$284.6 billion over six years. Despite the record-level of funding, the bill still fell substantially short of the investment needs documented by the U.S. Department of Transportation. Oberstar and DeFazio said the recent bridge collapse and other pressing transportation needs will play heavily in the next reauthorization of surface transportation programs in 2009, even though revenues to the highway account of the Highway Trust Fund are projected to fall short of expenditures. "We're open to all proposals," Oberstar said. "But the core has to be a dedicated revenue stream from the Highway Trust Fund. This is another wakeup call for the nation's infrastructure. We have to make a more robust investment than we are now. We're not going to settle for a bargain-basement highway bill."

### **Senate Approves Call for National Commission on Infrastructure**

The Senate unanimously approved the National Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2007, calling for creation of a national commission to address the deterioration of much of our nation's infrastructure including our roads, bridges, drinking water systems, dams and other public works. The bill, sponsored by Senators Norm Coleman (R-MN), Tom Carper (D-DE) and George Voinovich (R-OH) would also be charged with aiding in the nation's economic growth and ensuring the ability of the nation's infrastructure to meet current and future demands. "The I-35W bridge tragedy was proof that this nation is long overdue for an infrastructure overhaul," said Coleman. "We simply can not allow what happened in Minneapolis to occur anywhere else in this country. But before that can happen, we must take a long and honest look at the condition of our nation's bridges, dams and public works. We've seen what the price is for not addressing the problem, and this bill will put in place a plan to strengthen our national infrastructure over the next 30 years." "Today we saw true heroes in the face of unimaginable circumstances," said Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar. "Unfortunately, it took a tragic situation like this to underscore how critical investment in our nation's infrastructure is. A bridge shouldn't just fall down. We must take steps now to ensure this doesn't happen again—in Minnesota, or anywhere. Senator Coleman and I will continue to work together towards recovery, repair, and a new way of looking at our infrastructure." Voinovich said, "Our infrastructure is collapsing due to insufficient funding. And the deterioration of our nation's waterways and infrastructure systems are impacting our economy, our environment and the overall welfare of the American people. This legislation gets to the heart of the problem by establishing a commission that will provide concrete recommendations for future infrastructure needs. When enacted, this commission will lead the way in providing long-term solutions to the dire problems we currently face." Specifically, this bill would mandate:

- Establishment of the National Commission on the Infrastructure of the United States to ensure that the nation's infrastructure meets current and future demands and facilitates economic growth;
- Completion of a study by February 2009 that will address all matters relating to the state of the nation's infrastructure, including capacity of infrastructure improvements

to sustain current and anticipated economic development, the age, condition and capacity of public infrastructure, repair and maintenance needs, financing methods and investment requirements;

- Development of recommendations for a federal plan outlining infrastructure priorities; and
- Completion of a report to Congress by February 2009 that will detail infrastructure legislation deemed necessary for the next five, 15, 30 and 50 years.

### **House Passes SAFETEA-LU Technical Corrections Bill**

The House of Representatives approved a Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users technical corrections bill by a vote of 422-1 before they left on their August recess. But prospects in the Senate remain unclear. The bill, H.R. 3248, corrects a number of provisions in SAFETEA-LU, including increased funding for Federal Highway Administration research and development program, which includes supplementing the Strategic Highway Research Program II. The bill also extends the lifespan of the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission, as well as increases its funding by \$2 million. A previous version of the bill passed the House earlier this year by voice vote. H.R. 3248 also modifies the Repeat Intoxicated Driver Law to allow for the use of ignition interlock devices. This change gives states more flexibility to either continue with the current one-year license suspension requirement for repeat offenders, or permit a 45-day license suspension, after which limited driving privileges are reinstated provided an ignition interlock device is placed on the offender's vehicle. The legislation includes clarifying language that will assist the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in more fully interpreting SAFETEA-LU with regard to both New Start and Small Start project ratings and includes a provision clarifying FTA's role in considering the costs and benefits of transit tunnels to ensure that congestion relief, improved mobility, and other benefits of tunnels are specifically analyzed.

### **House Passes \$21 Billion Water Resources Bill; Senate Action Nears as Presidential Veto Looms**

The House of Representatives approved by a 381-40 margin the conference agreement on the Water Resources Development Act. The bill still faces action in the Senate, where it appears to have strong support despite presidential veto threats. H.R. 1495 calls for \$21 billion in U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects to aid navigation, flood prevention, protect against shoreline erosion and restore aquatic ecosystems. WRDA has not been reauthorized since 2000 and legislators said there is an enormous backlog. As passed, states will be eligible for water resources planning and technical assistance. H.R. 1495 also includes more than 900 state and regional specified projects and studies. According to *CQ Today*, the White House said the measure authorizes some projects outside the legislation's scope, such as abandoned mine reclamation and wastewater and drinking-water infrastructure. *CQ Today* reports the bill would authorize \$1.9 billion for the restoration of coastal Louisiana and \$3.6 billion for projects on the upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway system. It would authorize the first three projects of an Everglades restoration plan. A centerpiece of the legislation is a new independent peer review process for expensive or controversial Army Corps of Engineers projects.

### **Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day Nearing! Remember October 10<sup>th</sup>.**

Please visit the general website at <http://www.brakesonfatalities.org/>

In preparing for your jurisdiction's promotion of this event the NHTSA can to provide [Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day®](#) Stickers, Posters, &a CD-Rom with Reproducible Artwork materials

to support you and your partner organizations for this year's [Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day®](#) Outreach.

Materials Available:

**Item #**

**Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day® Stickers**

9Z0042 2" stickers in Spanish (you may order up to 2,500)

9Z0043 4" stickers in Spanish (you may order up to 2,500)

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9Z0045 4" stickers in English (you may order up to 2,500)

**Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day® Posters**

9P0177 Poster (you may order up to 5)

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Please allow for up to 4 weeks for delivery.

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- 1) The item number of what you are requesting
- 2) The quantity you are requesting
- 3) Your name and phone number (in case there are any questions about the order)
- 4) The complete mailing address (name, mailing address, city, state, zip) and phone number of where you want the materials sent.

**2006 TRAFFIC SAFETY ANNUAL ASSESSMENT - A PREVIEW**

[http://trb.org/news/blurbs\\_detail.asp?id=7951](http://trb.org/news/blurbs_detail.asp?id=7951)

The U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has released a fact sheet that previews results from the 2006 Annual Assessment of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crash Fatalities and Injuries report. According to the fact sheet, the number of people killed in the United States in motor vehicle traffic crashes declined from 43,510 in 2005 to 42,642 in 2006, the lowest level in five years. This decline is the largest in terms of both number and percentage since 1992. Or you can view on NHTSA site

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/portal/site/nhtsa/menuitem.6a6eaf83cf719ad24ec86e10dba046a0/>

**Eastern Snow Expo, August 29-30 in Columbus, Ohio**

The 12th annual Eastern Snow Expo will be held August 29-30 at the Greater Columbus Convention Center. The event is being held by AASHTO, the Federal Highway Administration and hosted by the Ohio Department of Transportation. This year, the expo welcomes the National Show and Ice Peer Exchange. The attendees include equipment and materials specifications writers; maintenance area supervisors; purchasing agents; resident and district maintenance engineers; state maintenance engineers; and winter maintenance engineers. Industry vendors and suppliers exhibit at the expo. The Crowne Plaza Hotel Downtown Columbus serves as the expo hotel and may be reached by phoning (800) 338-4462. For more information and registration visit,

<http://www.transportation.org/meetings/107.aspx> .