



July 16, 2008

TO THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

On behalf of the Association of Equipment Manufacturers (AEM), I write to urge you to support H.R. 3999, the National Highway Bridge Reconstruction and Inspection Act.

AEM is the North American-based international trade group serving the off-road equipment manufacturing industry, and its 800 member companies manufacture equipment, products and services used worldwide in the areas of agriculture, construction, forestry, mining and utilities.

The safety of our national infrastructure is a key priority for AEM member companies and their employees. The 2007 collapse of the I-35 W Bridge in Minneapolis was a tragedy for all victims and their families, but this disaster should serve also as a wake-up call about the importance of maintaining and improving transportation infrastructure facilities.

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), approximately 74,000 U.S. bridges are classified as structurally deficient. Furthermore, the U.S. DOT estimates it would cost \$65 billion (in constant 2004 dollars) to fix all existing bridge deficiencies. H.R. 3999 would begin addressing these backlogs by setting priorities for bridge improvements and establishing minimum inspection standards. This type of targeted reform would help ensure that bridges remain a productive and reliable component of the U.S. transportation infrastructure network.

Our nation's surface transportation system has vast unmet needs, and transportation inefficiencies are a growing impediment to the U.S. economy. These needs extend beyond bridges, to Interstate highways, to local roads, and to public transportation facilities. H.R. 3999 is a critical step in meeting these challenges.

Additionally, a comprehensive reform effort should be launched in the 2009 reauthorization of the federal highway and transit programs. This effort will require significant new federal investments and all available financing options, including increased user fees, should be utilized.

I again urge you to support H.R. 3999, the National Highway Bridge Reconstruction and Inspection Act. Should you or your staff have further questions, contact Nick Yaksich at (202) 898-9064 or at nyaksich@aem.org.

Sincerely,

Dennis J. Slater
President